THE STRICKEN LAND

SERBIA AS WE SAW IT

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CE & CLAUDE ASKEW

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THE STRICKEN LAND



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SERBIA AS WE SAW IT

BY

ALICE & CLAUDE ASKEW

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO

THE MEMORY OF THE SOLDIERS

WHO PERISHED IN SERBIA

DURING THE

GREAT RETREAT

AUTHORS' NOTE

CORFU, *May* 1916

WE have been requested by Colonel Dr. Borissavljevitch, President of the Serbian Red Cross, to publish the following letter. He has asked us to do so knowing that we have attempted to tell our English friends something of the suffering—of the martyrdom—of a gallant little nation that we, in England, are but just learning to appreciate at its true worth. He knows that it is our most earnest endeavour to promote a closer understanding; he knows that what we describe is what we have seen with our own eyes, and that we, better than most, have reason to appreciate the crying need that prevails among the stricken people of a stricken land.

Here is the appeal as it has been handed to us by Colonel Borissavljevitch:

"*To the* FRIENDS OF THE SERBIAN NATION:

"The history of the world knows no greater tragedy than that which has befallen the Serbian Nation. Victorious in the wars of 1912–1913, her army acquired honour and glory, and for a

while the realization of an ambition, long traditional in the Serbian breast, seemed to be at hand. It was, however, inevitable that any design embracing a closer union of Serbian elements must inevitably come into collision with the Germanic '*dring nach Osten*'—'pressure towards the East.' And so destiny willed it that immediately after two wars, in the course of which her arms had triumphed over the Turks and the Bulgars in quick succession, Serbia found herself opposed to an enemy infinitely superior in strength, and was compelled once again to draw the sword that she had barely had time to sheathe.

"In spite of being fatigued and worn out by the preceding wars, the Serbian people responded bravely to the call and rallied their strength to defend their country and their hearths against the invasion of the Austro-Germans. They were conscious of the heavy task that rested upon them, the responsibility towards themselves and towards their Allies . . . and they showed themselves worthy of trust, for it was not long before the whole world was singing the praise of their victories.

"But their trials were not yet exhausted. A twice-beaten enemy, craftily watching his opportunity, seizing the chance of an alliance with

Germany to make an attack which he would not have ventured alone, threw himself, for the third time, upon war-worn Serbia.

"It was an unequal contest. Defending with their heart's blood every foot of their native land, the Serbian soldiers were compelled to retreat from their beloved country and to tread a sad path across the stony and perilous heights of Montenegro, and amid the snow-filled wastes and gorges of Albania. Along the sinister road they passed, and their way was marked by the corpses of Serbia's heroic sons who fell worn out by cold and hunger, broken by grief and despair for their lost country, their abandoned homes. The superhuman efforts, the supreme trials—perhaps these will never be fully known; history does not hold in its annals any word of a Golgotha so bitter.

"But the Serbian nation has risen superior even to this last most terrible of blows. She has suffered stoically and in silence. Her soldiers, naked, frozen, famished, have yet never betrayed or mistrusted their Allies. Always and invincibly they have nourished the hope of better days to come; their confidence in final victory is unshaken—that victory in the gigantic struggle against a common foe which will mean for Serbia the triumph of her just cause.

"And now, thanks to their powerful friends, the men of Serbia, rested and restored, wait with impatience for the sacred hour when, side by side with their Allies, they may resume the fierce struggle against their enemies; and they will go into battle animated by the firmest belief in the ultimate resurrection of their country and of their national ideals.

"But for the fulfilment of this trust Serbia needs other, besides military, aid. The Society of the Serbian Red Cross, which has rendered most efficacious service in tending the wounded, finds itself to-day practically without the resources which are essential to enable it to carry on its Christian and humanitarian work. Therefore, now, at what may be—will be—the dawn of a new day, the Society ventures to make appeal to those of all nations who have at heart the cause of Serbia, the welfare of the Serbian race.

"There is a great need for completely organized hospitals, for the means of transporting the wounded and the sick, for linen, bedding, kitchen utensils, drugs, surgical instruments, and for financial assistance. In short, the Society stands in need of everything that may in any sense be reckoned useful in the tending of the wounded, the sick, and the sufferers from the war.

"Any gifts in kind—such as those mentioned

above, or port, brandy, rum, cigarettes, comestibles of all sorts, etc., may be sent to Colonel Borissavljevitch, President of the Serbian Red Cross, Care of the Wounded Allies' Relief Committee, Sardinia House, Kingsway, London, W.C. They will be most gratefully acknowledged by the committee, and should any kind donor wish to enter into personal communication or require direct information, any letter addressed to Colonel Dr. Borissavljevitch, Président de la Croix Rouge Serbe, Corfu, Greece, will receive immediate attention.

"Gifts of money should be sent, marked 'Serbian Fund' to T. O. Roberts, Esq., Manager, London County and Westminster Bank, Temple Bar Branch, 217 Strand, London, W.C., who will duly acknowledge the same and see to their safe transmission to the proper quarter.

"(Signed) COLONEL DR. BORISSAVLJEVITCH
"Le Président de la Société de la Croix Rouge Serbe"

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FOREWORD

LIESH (ALESSIO), ALBANIA
January 7, 1916

IT is Christmas Day, 1915.

Not our Western Christmas Day, not even Christmas Day according to the Calendar of the Roman Catholic population of this country, but just now—for us at least—there is no one of much account at Liesh except the Serb, and the Serb adheres to the Eastern Orthodox Church.

And so, although according to our English ideas we should esteem the New Year already a week old, we have learnt to accommodate ourselves to another reckoning. The Old Year is still with us, and it is Christmas Day.

Night has fallen, and it is some hours since I closed our shutters; we are usually glad when the time comes to do so, for otherwise we are tempted to sit by the window and gaze out—and we can rarely do so for long without being saddened and distressed. Even when things are taking their most normal course one cannot help noticing faces and figures, and there are some faces and figures that have a way of impressing themselves indelibly upon the mind. For what is it that we look out upon day after day, hour

by hour? Always the same. It is the passing of a phantom army, an army of the living dead.

That it is Christmas Day makes no difference to them. They have probably forgotten time as they have forgotten everything else except the dull gnawing of hunger, the weariness of numbed limbs, the vague longing for a goal that is always shifted as they approach it.

And we who look down upon these things—what wonder that we are saddened and distressed? For we are English and we have vaunted the honour of our country to these men who know—at least most of them do, though some are too ignorant to understand and some too tired to care—who know that a solemn pledge was spoken for all the world to hear, and that if they are treading now the stony road to Calvary it is because that pledge was unfulfilled.

And yet no word of complaint is raised against us—that is the wonderful part of it. Perhaps they know that the nation is not to blame for their betrayal, that they are the victims of statecraft and diplomacy and of that tragic policy of hesitation, the motto of which is "too late." Yet I have heard them deplore the fact that we in England do not understand them yet.

"You think we are a race of cut-throats and brigands."

Not once but many times that remark has been made to me. And I could not deny the truth of the statement, having heard the very

words spoken at home before we came out to Serbia.

No—even now there is no ill-will expressed against us; on the contrary, it is still to England that Serbia looks in her hour of humiliation and agony. A striking example of this was brought to our notice while we were at Scutari.

A young Serbian soldier lay dying of exposure and starvation. He had suffered terribly during the retreat—he had seen his brother shot down by the Bulgars, and his old father and mother had been left behind in the village home to what fate he knew not.

"England will avenge us." Those were the last coherent words he was heard to speak.

So England is still Serbia's friend. She is grateful to the French, too, who are helping her now in her extremity, but it is without the sense of intimate *rapprochement*; she cannot forget that the Bulgars were protégés of Russia; and as for Italy, the political differences between the two countries do not make for mutual trust.

We ourselves have had good reason to feel humiliated and ashamed. The recollection is vivid in my mind of a day at Pirot, before hostilities with Bulgaria actually commenced, when the English papers arrived and we read Sir Edward Grey's speech in the House of Commons in which he made a definite promise to Serbia, a promise from which, in honour, there could be no withdrawal.

Not only did we read that speech ourselves,

but, overjoyed at the tone of it, we translated it to our Serbian friends on the Staff of the Second Army. We vaunted it right and left. We were proud of our nationality in those days.

And then the war broke out and very soon afterwards we were cut off from all communication with the world. We knew nothing of what was happening outside Serbia, a very little of anything beyond our immediate environment.

But, as time went on, one fact stood out in grim and horrid prominence. The pledged help of the Allies was not, and would not be, forthcoming.

Why ? Day after day we asked the question and no one could answer it. The only natural conclusion seemed to be that some catastrophe of which we were not yet aware must have befallen England and her Allies; otherwise surely, surely, she would have held to her solemn covenant.

Our Serbian friends agreed that this must be so—yet it was strange that no rumour of disaster had filtered through.

" When we get to Podgoritza we shall know," they said. But that would be a long time yet; and so we lived in fear and concern for our country—fear lest misfortune had befallen her, concern for her honour's sake.

We reached Podgoritza. There were no newspapers to be had even there, but there were people who could tell us of the course of the war. It was then well on in December, and we had had no definite news since early October.

"There's nothing very exciting to report," so we were told almost casually. "Nothing, at least, beyond this Balkan business."

"Nothing to report—nothing?" It would be hard to describe our feelings. Our terror of a great calamity had been groundless. But what about the honouring of a pledged word?

If we had not seen it in cold print, if we had not translated those fateful sentences for the benefit of Serbian ears! Some one told us that in a later speech Sir Edward Grey had "explained"—that he had given a different interpretation to his words to that which the world had understood; some one else mentioned that there had been trouble in France on the same question, and that as a consequence M. Delcassé had resigned.

But beyond this there was very little that we could ascertain with any degree of certainty, and even now as I write, weeks later, the mystery remains a mystery still. Can it be possible that there is no explanation to be made?

We reviled Greece for having failed to abide by a solemn treaty; but what can we say for ourselves?

There is a reason why I am writing these things to-night. We had one or two of our Serbian friends here to dinner—to celebrate Christmas Day!—but it was a poor attempt at festivity, and we took to looking back and looking forward, and one way was as dark as the other, while everything that lay between was

attuned to the key of grey. Besides there was something happened to make us sad.

Yet we started the morning filled with the intention of doing what justice we could to the season. We had a particularly miserable time at our own Christmas, thirteen days ago, so we determined to atone for this if we could. And as luck would have it there was a little more food than usual obtainable, which made dinner a feasible proposition.

We sat down to it at midday, hungry and cheerful, a little party of four. We wanted to forget Liesh and its horrors, to pretend that we were somewhere far away. We drew up a fanciful menu to cover the deficiencies of our actual meal.

But it was not easy to forget when one sat facing a window that looked out upon the scene of Serbia's daily martyrdom. There was the grey river, foul with the carcasses of dead things; on either side of it a road, and both roads were charged at all hours with thronging humanity, grey of face and grey of garment and grey of spirit; the tumbledown wooden bridge, almost too frail to bear the constant weight of silent misery that trailed across it; the low long hill of grey stones that seemed themselves to be alive and astir because of the teeming life among them: and above it all a grey hopeless sky.

Who could wonder that one's thoughts were tinged with grey? Perhaps the sun may shine at Liesh, but we have hardly seen it yet; perhaps

green grass may peep between the stones, and the sloping hill-side beneath the massive walls of the ruined fort, grim and grey, be bright with gorse and heather, the violet and wild anemone. I have heard so, I have been told that the spring and summer colouring of Montenegro and Albania is a marvel to behold; but now it is midwinter, and it is many weeks since we have seen a flower; our way has been laid through stony places, through swamp and mire, through a desolation that made one shudder and turn giddy for its very vastness, until at last, at Liesh, we have asked ourselves if a spot more cruel, more repulsive, can be found on the whole of God's earth.

Yet all the while we know in our hearts that it is not with our normal eyes that we are judging; at another season, when the wave of human agony has passed it by, Liesh might appear to us as fair as it now is foul.

And fate has been against us this Christmas Day. Hardly had we sat down to our dinner when a little stir without on the river bank attracted our attention. It was nothing to cause any commotion, any material interruption of the ceaseless traffic—so ordinary an incident that there were few who paused and many did not trouble to turn their heads.

Only a young soldier, worn out with hunger and fatigue, who had just slipped from his saddle and lay dying by the roadside. One more victim of diplomacy—what need to worry when the

same thing was happening in dozens of other places along the fatal road, had happened yesterday and would happen to-morrow?

The "pope" attached to the Second Army told us last night that he had buried forty men that day, and Liesh is a little place, a very little place.

But this young soldier was not dead; had he been one would have shrugged one's shoulders and turned one's head away. As we watched he stirred.

There was only one man with him now, a ragged companion. Perhaps he was glad of the rest, for he had seated himself on the low wall; his arms hung limply to his sides, his face looked as if it had been moulded in clay—a mask of helpless resignation.

We did what we could. We had a little coarse rum—some one had produced it in honour of the day—and we tried to pour a few drops into the sick man's mouth, but his teeth were tightly clenched and we could do no more than moisten his lips. His feet were bare and bloodstained; we wrapped them in some sacking and we brought out our brazier and tried to warm them at that—but one could see that the cold had already gripped his heart.

"He's done for," said the other man. "What do you expect? Look at his clothes—look at his feet. He sold his boots for a mouthful of bread. There were several of us that lost our company—we got left behind. Douchan couldn't

walk so we put him on a horse—the horse could hardly walk either. We've tramped all night trying to catch up the rest, but it's no good and we're hungry, hungry."

He glanced at his dying friend and then looked up at us fiercely. "Why don't you leave him alone?" he muttered. "He's best off as he is."

Perhaps he was. When one remembered the miles of swamp that stretched out to Durazzo one was almost impelled to put one's natural instincts aside and agree. But it made the heart sore to look down at that young soldier's face and realize the woeful sacrifice of youth and strength and spirit. If he could have died, as he would willingly have died, with his face to the foe—but thus, in the humiliation of retreat, on strange soil, and with all the warm energy of his body spent to no account—the pity of it!

And he was but one among so many. Oh, if the smug diplomats who sit in their easy chairs at home, well fed, the men who have it in their power to make or mar, and who, from a distance, may profess to pity starving Serbia, could but come to Liesh and look upon their handiwork! For the shame of retreat before the foe is not with Serbia; the victory was to her enemy before a single blow was struck; yet she must pay in her agony and bloody sweat for the fault of those who wield the pen and not the sword.

We who were at Mladenovatz and Pirot for weeks before actual hostilities commenced have

reason to know that this is true. We were receiving newspapers then, and the tone of the Press, almost universally, was astounding to us. It was as if, to the very last, conviction existed that Bulgaria proposed to enter the lists on our side. She was mobilizing her army, had mobilized it, to stand by the Allies. Every man, woman, and child in Serbia knew that this was not so, but repeated warnings were of no avail; not even Bulgaria's arrogant reply to the proposed cession of Serbian territory—that she could win it back for herself—made any material difference in the affection with which she seemed to be regarded by certain of the authorities at home.

And so Serbia's army, ready and eager to strike for her own cause and that of her Allies, was held inactive while Bulgaria went on quietly playing Germany's game. Her troops massed on the Serbian frontier acted as a bait to draw off and weaken the Danube defences, so that Belgrade stood no chance when a well-calculated attack was made upon that city.

Even then Serbia was not allowed to strike in the East. It was as if her Allies said to her, "No—don't you see that Bulgaria is not quite ready? You must really allow her time to strengthen her defences and bring up her men. Meanwhile we are still conferring."

And so they went on conferring until the Austro-Germans had obtained a firm footing in the land, and until Bulgaria's preparations were

complete. Then, long after the hour of destiny had struck, war was declared. It was too late —the fall of Serbia had already been assured at the diplomatic table.

And when to this we add the utter failure of all the solemn pledges of assistance, who shall say that Serbia was not betrayed ?—even though it be conceded that the betrayal was due to faulty statecraft and not to ill-will. But the general who fails in strategy is punished for his failure; only the statesman and the diplomat may blunder and their faults be glossed over or hidden under the cloak of official secrecy.

But no doubt one day the secret history of the Balkan campaign of 1915 will be written—and then we shall know.

I have no information as to what public opinion in England or among the Allies may be. I have seen no newspapers; the men with whom I have spoken are but little better informed upon the subject than I. No doubt all I have written is of common knowledge, but my pen seems to have been guided to-night by an invisible hand—that of the poor soldier boy who reached his Calvary by the river-side at Liesh on Christmas Day, 1915.

These things, too, we have discussed with our Serbian friends to-day as we have discussed them many times before. And it is because I have felt impelled to put them on paper, in a chapter to themselves, that I have broken off from the routine work of writing up the records of our

experiences, upon which I have been engaged since we reached Scutari and found ourselves with time on hand. Perhaps they may be finished before we are able to leave Liesh, and I think that will be for the best; our readers will understand that we have written of things as we have seen and realized them on the spot; however faulty our impressions may be, they are at least sincere; nor shall we allow ourselves, in publishing them, to alter or modify them in any way according to after-acquired knowledge.

It has been a grey day, and our Christmas party, regarded as such, was a dire failure. The night fell with a hint of storm, and when I closed the shutters, many hours ago now, threatening clouds were scudding across the sky. By the way the windows rattle I don't think matters have improved. It is a bad night for those who have no roof to cover them, and there are many such just now in and around Liesh. If I opened the shutters I should see the flickering camp fires lying along the hill-side across the river like streaks of living blood, and there would be dark figures, huddled together for warmth, lying and sitting anyhow, anywhere, in the open space upon which I should look down. I know they are there, those dark figures, for I can hear their voices mingled with the sighing of the wind. Sometimes they talk all night, and then I wonder what they are saying to each other.

It is very late and our lamp is burning low. I think the oil is nearly exhausted—we were lucky

to get some to-day ; last night we had to manage with a candle stuck into an empty bottle. The charcoal has burnt itself out in the brazier too, and the wind that whistles in through the cracks of the shutters and through the holes in the roof—we do not boast a ceiling—strikes very cold. How they must feel it outside ! There are the unfortunate horses, too, tethered in the yard. They are never still—they are hungry, poor brutes, for fodder is very scarce.

It is time to lay down my pen and try to rest and forget. The New Year may have better things in store.

It is Christmas Day, 1915.

THE STRICKEN LAND

SERBIA AS WE SAW IT

CHAPTER I

EN ROUTE

SCUTARI, *December* 1915

As it is likely that we may be detained at Scutari for a week or so, it seems a favourable opportunity to set to work on the record of our experiences and impressions of the last nine months.

Since the middle of last October we have been cut off from any sort of communication with the outside world; we have seen no newspapers, received no letters, met no one who can genuinely enlighten us as to the progress of the war or as to the trend of public opinion. Here at Scutari a few facts may filter through, together with much rumour, but they do not help us much.

And just because things are so, it seems to me that these notes which I propose to collect together may have an added interest. They have been written, so to speak, upon the spot, and are unbiased by any after-formed opinions. And if, as may well be the case, there should be errors in our script, they may perhaps be forgiven us,

since we have no means of rectifying or revising what we write. To a great extent, indeed, we are depending upon our memories, since many of our notes, with all the newspaper cuttings and such like which we put aside for future use, have been lost. But I have little doubt that our memories will serve us well; the main circumstances that we shall try to set forth have been far too poignant to be easily forgotten.

It is possible, writing so much of ourselves, that we may sometimes lay too much weight upon small details, personal trivialities; if so, we must crave forgiveness: we feel, however, that it is very often the trivial things which best convey an understanding of a whole condition possibly so complex that long phrases would hardly make it clear.

It is pleasant, too, to realize that, in a sense, we voice Serbia. It is not only our own opinions that we shall set forth. We possess no reference books, but we do possess Serbian friends—many of them. It is to them we turn if we are in need of information. Our readers in England may take it as true that when we report Serbian words, when we speak of Serbian feelings or emotions, it is not because we think that such words might have been spoken, such feelings or emotions expressed, but because in every case they actually were spoken or expressed.

The use of the first person singular generally employed throughout is a mere matter of convenience. We were not always together, and

under such circumstances it is difficult to make oneself clear if one is limited to the plural expression.

I cannot guess what progress we shall make with our work here at Scutari. It shall be continued, if possible, at whatever spot our next halt is made. They say at present that it will be Liesh.

* * * * *

When we, together with the unit to which we were attached—the First British Field Hospital for Serbia—reached Salonika on April 15th, 1915, we made eager inquiry for news. We had been a fortnight at sea without touching anywhere, and it seemed impossible that so many days could have gone by without material event.

Of course we were particularly anxious to know what was transpiring in the Balkans: we were a Field Hospital, fully equipped for work at the Front, and when we left England it was in the confident belief that our services would very soon be required in an active capacity. We were already definitely attached to the Second Serbian Army, admitting no other jurisdiction than that of the Serbian military authorities. In this particular we differed from other British "missions"—the word grates, but it has been so generally employed that I must perforce use it now and then—for they all came under the directorship of Sir Ralph Paget. Whether we were wise in thus setting ourselves apart I do not profess to say; as matters turned

out the general result was not in any way affected, while from the personal point of view of Alice and myself, apart from the hospital, it was of inestimable value to us, as writers, to be brought, as we were, into such close touch with the Serbian army.

We had calculated as most likely that we should be sent direct from Salonika to Mladenovatz, where, as we already knew, the Second Army was quartered. Mladenovatz is not very far from Belgrade, and we should thus be on the spot when the offensive was resumed, as we had not the smallest doubt that it would be quite shortly—if hostilities had not already commenced while we were on the voyage out.

It was a belief in which we were fully justified. The Russians were advancing steadily; Rumania and Greece seemed likely to throw in their lot with the Allies at any time; Bulgaria, too, was on the brink—everybody at home had been most confident that we should eventually have the support of Bulgaria—how could she range herself against Russia? Austria, generally speaking, was in a bad way. All that was required was that the Serbian army should be firmly re-established as a fighting force after the fatigue of its recent heroic effort, and that the spectre of disease should be conjured from the country—then most certainly would come the turn of the tide.

We indulged in roseate dreams in those days. With the Balkan States in harmony and united to the Entente Powers, what was to hinder a great advance of the Allies into Austria-Hungary from



Photo *Underwood & Underwood*

THE FIRST BRITISH FIELD HOSPITAL FOR SERBIA

(Photographed on board *S.S Saidiah*)

the south! From every point of view—especially considering the weakness of Austria at that time, and the Russian successes in Transylvania—this seemed to offer a far more favourable field of attack than either the Eastern or Western lines. It was not even necessary to have the co-operation of Rumania and Bulgaria; that of Greece was sufficient, and now that we were at war with Turkey, and the Dardanelles campaign was in full swing, it seemed inevitable that Greek territory would soon—if it were not already—be available for the passage of the allied troops.

I remember laughing to scorn a sceptic who professed to know something of the diplomatic trend of those days. "*If* Greece comes in!" he remarked. "We might have had Greece with us months ago if we had gone the right way about it and treated her decently. As it is—well, wait and see."

I have often wondered since then how much he really knew.

However, we were not to be discouraged. The policy as we saw it seemed so practical that we were almost ready to take its realization for granted. We saw ourselves, with our unit, following in the wake of a conquering army, the Hospital, of course, fulfilling its purpose of usefulness to the end. What a wonderful experience it would be to witness the capitulation of a great city—say Budapest, in order not to be too presumptuous! That would be worth living for; that would be worth any amount of personal

risk and privation, of hard work in ward and field. To that we were all agreed.

Vain dreams. Many months have passed since those hopeful days when we landed at Salonika. The vision of Budapest has vanished like the mirage city of the desert, and in its place we have seen the cruel stony path of retreat.

We were a little undeceived, but not discouraged, when we found that nothing very material had happened during our voyage, and that Greece was still pursuing a vacillating policy. The only piece of news affecting us was hardly cheering. It was that Bulgarian Comitajis had made an irruption into Serbian territory and foully massacred a number of soldiers and civilians who had been taken unawares. They had perpetrated vile atrocities upon their helpless victims, such as gouging out their eyes and cutting off their noses. There was a suggestion that the Bulgarian murderers were not altogether the mere band of irregulars that they professed to be, but nobody doubted that the "incident" would be quietly settled by diplomatic processes.

It was—nor anywhere outside Serbia does it appear to have been regarded as a warning.

We stayed the inside of a week at Salonika, as our stores had to be collected together, which was a task demanding time and patience. The greater part had come out upon a different vessel to the one that had carried us; ours, the *Saidiah*, of the Khedival Line, was bound for Alexandria and making no long stay in port.

Poor old *Saidiah*, we have mixed memories of her, on the whole not unaffectionate. Never did ship rock as she rocked, and by the time we reached our journey's end there must have been a tremendous deficit in glass and crockery, for great was the daily destruction thereof. Food was sadly deficient too; there was no cold storage, so a large proportion had to be got rid of, after due inquest had been held upon it, when we were half-way out.

Nevertheless, we contrived to enjoy ourselves. There were several units on board besides our own, and, taking it all round, a spirit of harmony prevailed, not always the case under similar conditions. The feeling that animated the members of the "First British Field Hospital for Serbia" was to work hard or play hard, whichever was dictated by the exigencies of the moment, and they saw no reason, because they were travelling with a serious purpose in view, why they should be unduly depressed and melancholy. And so they indulged in various lively games on deck; "Twos and Threes"—an improved form of what the children call "Touch"; "Medicine Ball"—this is played with a very large football, weighing ten pounds, which is thrown as violently as possible from one to another and must be caught, if possible; "Follow My Leader"—a game that always evoked a lot of laughter, for the leader invariably chose a course over the greatest number of obstacles that he could pick out. Sometimes in the course of these rather

wild processions we would come across a serious class deep in the study of Serbian; they would look at us with mild reproach—but I am not sure that there was not a touch of envy in many eyes. We got up concerts and various entertainments too, but it happened all too often that half the cast and the best part of the audience would be down with sea-sickness and unable to attend.

If any of those who may have been disposed to criticize us, because we found it possible to appreciate life even in war time, had had occasion to visit us at Pirot, where real hard work was the order of the day, they would have been bound to admit that a very human *joie de vivre* is an indication of energy and not of slackness. That the energy so amply demonstrated on the Bulgarian frontier met with a sudden and lamentable check was in no way the fault of the "First British Field Hospital."

The staff of our unit had been carefully selected by the Committee in London. The organizer of the enterprise was Dr. J. Hartnell Beavis, whose name was already known in connection with similar work in Belgium. With him—his right-hand man—was Mr. Gerald Sim, who had been in Belgium too, where he had won his laurels as an expert chauffeur. Our chief surgeon was Mr. Fergus Armstrong, F.R.C.S., who had given up an important post to join us, and a more able operator or pleasant companion could not have been desired. Alas, he was not with us at Pirot, having undertaken during the slack period

that preceded the Bulgarian outbreak to work for Lady Paget at Skoplje. I have no doubt that he was with the Paget Hospital when Skoplje fell, and that he, with them, is now a prisoner in Bulgarian hands. As physician we had Dr. G. Landsborough Findlay, who, with his wife, Lady Sybil—one of our nurses, and quite indefatigable when there was work on hand—had already done much rough travelling in all parts of the world, and was therefore invaluable for field service. He was never so much in his element as when he was putting up or taking down a tent, and since tents for all purposes formed a most essential part of our equipment, there was every prospect before him of a busy time.

The unit consisted of some twenty-six individuals altogether—surgeons, dressers, orderlies, chauffeurs, a staff of most capable nurses, a cook, a washerwoman, an interpreter—and a dog.

As for Alice and myself, we went out essentially as writers, though we were prepared to turn our hands to odd jobs if called upon to do so. We had assisted Dr. Hartnell Beavis in London with the formation of the unit, the raising of funds, and the collection of stores.

It was the reports in the English Press of the terrible state into which Serbia had fallen during the winter of 1914–1915 that first inspired us to work for that gallant little country. Perhaps to-day, overshadowed by a still greater catastrophe, the recollection of the plague of typhus

that ravaged the land from end to end may have grown dim, that plague that was transmitted to their conquerors—one would not like to say consciously—by the defeated Austrians, who left behind them, when they retreated from Valievo, soldiers in whom the disease was developed.

It was then that a bitter cry went up for help, and Great Britain, touched to the heart, and perhaps, as a sporting nation, particularly appreciating the plucky fight that Serbia, unaided, had put up against her powerful neighbour, responded with ready warmth and generosity. Other nations were hardly behind her in their desire to help; brave men and women laid down their lives for Serbia, and Serbia was grateful—she is grateful still in her new and overwhelming sorrow, for she knows that however much she may have been abandoned it was by governments and not by people.

I should be sorry to miss this opportunity of expressing our thanks to all the kind friends whose answer to our appeal was so prompt and disinterested. Mr. Alexander McConnell, our secretary, had every reason to be gratified with his daily correspondence. Very touching were some of the letters he received—especially those from quite poor people who were nevertheless eager to help those who were worse off than themselves. A large number of those letters, too, were anonymous, so that we could not, as we should have liked, give them any sort of personal acknowledgment.

Then there were the gifts in kind. I wish I had space to enumerate the useful commodities that were placed at our disposition by large firms as well as by private individuals. It would be an easy and a grateful task, for very little reflection would supply some pleasant memory in connection with each; but where there were so many it would be invidious to name one or two, so I must perforce content myself with expressing our gratitude in general terms.

I am, however, thankful to be able to state that practically all the stores which were so generously presented to us were distributed as the donors would have wished. We had a good six months in which to dispose of them, for it was not till early November that Krushervatz fell, and with it went all our extensive hospital equipment, together with the main personal belongings of every member of the unit. We were no luckier in this respect than any other of the foreign "missions" in Serbia.

I have said that we had a dog with us; we took her out as a mascot, but I am afraid she did not altogether realize the dignity of her position. She was a powerful, fierce-looking, but quite affectionate, bull-dog. Her particular master had elected to call her "Soona." I rather fancy it was because she looked more likely to bite sooner than later. This was rather a libel, as she was not disposed to bite humans—but she did not apply the same rule to horses, as we soon found out when we got her ashore at Salonika.

Soona took rather a fancy to me, which was flattering but occasionally inconvenient—as when, on board the *Saidiah*, she would insist on sharing my berth, which distinctly did not provide room for two. Her idea seemed to be that she would feel the motion less if she lay on my chest, and as she was a large and heavy dog, we were hardly likely to agree upon the subject.

We took her with us to Skoplje, but as we were practically never able to leave her off the chain because of her animosity to horses—not an uncommon propensity in bull-dogs, I imagine—we were obliged to part with her. She was adopted by M. Nusits, a well-known author in Serbia, a newspaper proprietor and Director of the Skoplje Theatre, whose son had taken a fancy to her. M. Nusits had a house in the country where Soona could be allowed more liberty than she got with us. I fear, however, that she was no mascot to her new owners, for young Nusits, who was a charming boy, mightily proud of his recently acquired dignity as a lieutenant, was killed at the very outbreak of the Bulgarian war.

We had other pets to take Soona's place. When you are in a camp there are always stray dogs who turn up and ask to be adopted. We drew the line when we had acquired three of these at Mladenovatz—in addition to another two or three which we had brought with us from Skoplje. It was all right for those, like ourselves, who are fond of dogs, but there were others who con-

sidered the camp was becoming too much of a menagerie.

I cannot refrain from mentioning another queer "pet" we had. This was an eagle, and we found it at Skoplje, shut up in a wooden case ever so much too small for it. Some one had caught it, intending, I believe, to take it out of the country, and had then gone away, forgetting all about it. We decided that the kindest thing would be to let it free.

We thought it would fly away, but it could not —at any rate, it did not. It elected to take up its residence in the hospital yard—much to Soona's indignation, and occasionally to the alarm of our visitors. Now and then, in a spirit of curiosity, it would invade the hospital itself, hopping solemnly up the broad staircase, and rather disposed to resent ejectment. Curiosity was certainly a conspicuous trait in that bird's character; we were lucky enough to get a snapshot at it one day while it was inspecting a bottle of Perrier Water with the greatest apparent interest and with all the aspect of a connoisseur.

Eagles, by the way, are very common in the Balkans. We have seen more than enough of them during the cruel days of the retreat. Here in Albania the native, I am told, calls himself the "son of an eagle." It is not an inappropriate title, as many unfortunate Serbs who fell a prey to marauding bands—if they escaped with their lives—would willingly testify.

Taking things all round we were not sorry to

disembark from the *Saidiah*, but I think that no one who travelled upon her heard without a sigh of kindly reminiscence, some weeks later, that she had been torpedoed in the Channel and gone to the bottom. We had had an anxious time ourselves for a couple of days and nights in the early part of the voyage, for we were fair game for the enemy, and without escort. We had had our places allotted to us in the lifeboats, but the sea was very rough and I don't think we should have stood much chance if we had been compelled to take to them.

As for Salonika, I could easily fill a volume if I proposed to let myself go upon the historical and political associations of this " coveted town," as it has been aptly termed. I got to know it pretty well, and the surrounding country too, as I spent some weeks there at a later date when I came down from Mladenovatz to meet the second unit of our hospital, which had arrived from England with more cars and tents and a fresh supply of badly needed stores.

The main charms of Salonika, to me, lay in its colour and in its queer street corners, which impelled me to go wandering about with a camera, expending films with a lavishness that I was bound to regret later on when they were not so easily obtainable. I liked, too, to sit at one of the cafés in the chief square of the town and watch the people—it was so astonishingly like a scene on the comic opera stage that it took one some time to realize that it was true. To enjoy the best

effect, one had to sit facing the quay, for there the greatest variety of costume was generally to be seen, while the blue water of the bay, with Mount Olympus looming hazily in the far background, provided a setting hard to beat.

The most noteworthy inhabitants of Salonika are certainly the Jews. Over and over again we saw the stage Shylock personified, and hardly ever without the heavy fur overcoat, in which he takes such pride and delight that he wears it summer and winter alike. Now that the Turkish rule is suspended, he is not afraid of making some display of wealth; a few years ago it was as much as his life was worth to appear richer than his neighbours, for if he did not promptly pay the new and extortionate taxes that would be imposed upon him, he was bound to find himself shortly behind the walls of the grim White Tower, where the authorities had means of argument that generally proved efficacious.

It was near this ancient edifice that King George of Greece was assassinated; the spot, as yet, is only marked by an inconspicuous obelisk and a small shrine. They say that when King Constantine was lying ill during the summer his constant cry in delirium was: "To Salonika!" It was as if he realized somehow that the fortunes of himself and of his kingdom were bound up with the fate of that city.

Some distance farther down the same road is the large house, surrounded by a high wall, where Abdul Hamid, with his harem, was held

prisoner after his deposition by the Young Turks. There is still a very large Turkish population at Salonika, and a considerable portion of the "bazaar" remains wooden-roofed as it used to be. Shopping is quite an interesting experience. Over and over again we found that if a tradesman had not got what you wanted he would put himself to the trouble of accompanying you from shop to shop until you did get it, so if you were in doubt as to where to buy a certain thing, you were generally safe in asking for it at the first shop that came handy. With such remarkable civility I hardly like to suggest that there might be an understanding as to commission between the tradespeople concerned.

When I was first at Salonika public sentiment was extremely pro-Ally. But there was a tremendous amount of secret German influence at work, and the town swarmed with spies, who never lost an opportunity of fomenting ill-feeling between the Greeks and the many foreigners, such as ourselves, who happened to be among them.

I witnessed a curious instance of this during my second visit to Salonika. We were dining a large party at the Hôtel de Rome—it was on the occasion of a wedding—and after the meal, when general good-fellowship seemed to have spread through the large room crowded with other diners, a gentleman sat down to the piano and played national anthems. We had those of England, France, Russia, Serbia—nearly all

the company standing—and then, naturally, we wanted that of Greece. But just as our friend was about to oblige, he was told that there was a decree which prohibited the playing of the Greek National Anthem on such an occasion—and so it was not played.

Of course it was a plot into which we had fallen, and our seeming lack of respect to the country whose guests we were might have caused considerable adverse comment. Luckily we had journalistic friends, who put the matter right for us as far as they were able.

There was much excitement in Salonika at that time over the elections, and riots might quite easily have occurred. There had been so much intimidation on the part of German partisans throughout Macedonia that the results for the whole province had to be annulled.

With so many pleasant recollections of Salonika and its inhabitants it is sad to have to recall another sort of population of a very active and predatory description. Mosquitoes, fleas, and other things—especially other things—are rampant in summer. Nowhere was I tormented by them so much—not even in the filthiest of Montenegrin "hans," though that is probably accounted for by the fact that it was winter when we crossed Montenegro. There were other curious insects as well that used to invade one's bedroom; I particularly remember one that looked like nothing so much as an animated herring-bone—I have a vivid recollection of

this gentleman, for I captured one once in order that an entomologist friend might pronounce judgment upon it, and then accidentally allowed it to escape among a lot of people who were unprepared for a visitation of the sort. The small amount of scientific interest they took in my find was quite disappointing.

A good many of the men of our unit had their heads practically shaved before proceeding to Serbia, and continued to keep up the treatment all the time; beyond promoting the eventual growth of hair, if there happened to be a weakness in that direction, I doubt if they gained much by the proceeding. The real danger is from the body-louse—it is by this vermin that typhus is spread—and we were all provided with special garments as a protection against its attack. Weird garments they were, with tight elastic bands at throat, wrists, and ankles, at which points they were also supposed to be saturated with lysol or some such disinfectant; I have no doubt as to their value, but I rather fancy they must have been so well packed away when we left Salonika as to be quite forgotten, for certainly I never heard of them again. That they were hardly becoming garments from the feminine point of view can of course have had nothing to do with it.

I am glad that there were hardly any among the women of our unit who had their hair cut short before proceeding into Serbia. There were so many others who did, and who seemed to

consider it necessary also to unsex themselves as far as they could possibly contrive to do so. If only they could have heard the comments that were made upon them by the Greeks!—and I am afraid that our men were not altogether free from offence either in the matter of their personal appearance. The British spirit of independence is a very fine thing, but it doesn't add to our popularity abroad.

One day soon after our arrival in a certain town —I must lay stress upon the fact that it was an out-of-the-way spot—I accompanied a lady into a shop. While she was completing her purchases I chatted at the door with an elderly man belonging to the establishment.

"Pardon me," he remarked, "but of what nationality is mademoiselle?"

I replied that she was English.

He shook his head incredulously. "No, no," he declared, "I have seen many English women since the 'missions' have been coming here. It is not possible that mademoiselle is English. Why, she is *pretty*!"

I left him quite unconvinced—but I fancy he may have found reason to change his views. This was not the only time, however, that I heard a remark of the kind. The Serb is simple-minded, little experienced in the world outside, and very ready to pronounce an opinion upon superficial evidence. Most certainly they do not approve of the "Suffragette" type, and since they saw so much of it in their country, they were disposed

to believe that all Englishwomen are cast in the same mould. I was once asked if it were not true that we had an army of "Suffragettes" in the field!

The ladies of our own unit, I am happy to say, did their best to dispel the illusion.

CHAPTER II

FROM SALONIKA TO SKOPLJE

THERE are two lines of railway by which Serbia may be reached from Salonika, one going no farther than Monastir, just over the border, the other the main Salonika–Nish–Belgrade line, which branches at many points, serving the whole country and forming junction at Belgrade, under normal conditions, with the Austro-Hungarian Railway, and just beyond Pirot, on the east, with that of Bulgaria. The Belgrade–Pirot section constitutes a part of the all-important Constantinople line. Also any one travelling to Sofia or Central Bulgaria from north or south must of necessity traverse Serbia. From which two facts are abundantly clear: the value of this railway to Germany on the one hand, and to Bulgaria on the other.

Travelling to Skoplje—the Turkish Uskub—where our first halt had to be made, by this main route, we had ample leisure to consider its importance to its legitimate owner as well, representing as it does a direct high road to the sea. Forced by the Powers in 1913 to abandon her claim to Durazzo, it is little wonder that, pride of conquest apart, Serbia could not see her way

to surrender Macedonia to her envious neighbour, thus allowing the latter to cut her off from the only outlet to the sea that remained to her. The fact was forcibly pointed out to us by a Serbian gentleman with whom we got into conversation on the train. We next ventured to ask what he thought about the resumption of hostilities, and his opinion was that the Allies, with or without the consent of Greece, would shortly be compelled to send a strong force to the Danube.

"Turkey is crying out for aid," he said, "and there is nothing that the Central Powers desire so much as to open up the Constantinople railway, which they can only do by joining hands with Bulgaria across Serbia. They will move heaven and earth to get Bulgaria in on their side, and you may be assured that there is only one thing holding the Bulgars back at present—the Russian successes. If the Russian advance should be stemmed, then let the Allies be careful." He laughed confidently. "But they won't fail us—we in Serbia feel safe enough. Friendship apart, they cannot afford to do it. England especially, since Serbia, situated as she is, is the main bar upon Teutonic aspirations towards the East. Let Serbia fall, and England will be giving up the key to Constantinople, Bagdad, Egypt, and India."

I have set down these words, although they embrace sentiments which have no doubt been repeated over and over again after Bulgaria entered the arena, because they were spoken the

best part of five months before that event. Nor was there anything particularly remarkable or prophetic about them. I cannot sufficiently emphasize the fact that in Serbia nobody doubted the hostile intervention of Bulgaria the moment that conditions appeared favourable, and I have heard it inferred—though naturally I can only speak upon hearsay—that repeated representations were made at home, even as far back as May and June 1915, but that the warnings were carelessly brushed aside.

Our friend of the train had a fine illustration to emphasize his contention when we drew up at the little station of Strumitza. For it was here that the Bulgarian Comitajis, of whom I have already spoken, had made their attack; and broken, blackened walls, together with some fifty or more small mounds, each marked by a plain wooden cross, remained as the tokens of their murderous passage.

Many years ago we were all weeping over the "Bulgarian atrocities" of Abdul the Damned, and it looks as if we were still disposed to exhibit the same spirit of sympathy, though the boot is very much upon the other foot.

Perhaps the capacity of the Bulgars for perpetrating atrocities on their own account has been but little appreciated in England—or it may be that all the natives of the Balkans are regarded, without discrimination, as tarred with the same brush.

But this is not fair upon our Allies the Serbs.

I have spoken with unprejudiced people who were in the Balkans during the wars of 1912–13. I have seen official records, actual photographs. The latter are horrible to a degree. The second Balkan War was short, and animated by the most violent passions, and excesses doubtless occurred upon both sides; but with the Serbs they were isolated cases, with the Bulgars systematic—the result of frustrated hopes.

I had in my possession at Skoplje an officially issued book upon the subject. It was given me by a friend, a Mr. Doklestitch, who was of Dalmatian origin, but a naturalized American subject. He joined our unit eventually as interpreter, and proved himself of great service owing to his large number of acquaintances throughout the country. I think the book, which was terrible in its detailed horrors, bore his name upon it; at any rate Mr. Doklestitch was very genuinely concerned, when we were brought into close touch with the Bulgars, as to what had become of it. Supposing we should be taken prisoners with such a book in our possession! The possibilities were not pleasing to contemplate. Mr. Doklestitch wanted to have it destroyed immediately, but this was impossible, as it was packed away with other things which had been sent with the general hospital stores to Krushervatz. Here it must eventually, with everything else, have fallen into the enemy's hands, and I trust they profited by the perusal of it.

What are these Comitajis, the sad record of whose work we witnessed at Strumitza railway station?—The town, by the way, is across the border, upon Bulgarian territory.

In Turkish times they were to be found in all the subject States, an irregular soldiery, waging a constant guerilla warfare against their hated rulers. In Serbia they came into being as the "Hydooks" about the beginning of the fifteenth century, when Serbian independence was first lost. At this time, and for four hundred years after, the unhappy Serbs had no rights or privileges, and were utterly at the mercy of the Turkish landlords and officials. The only protection they ever received was from these Hydooks, irreconcilable insurgents who were regarded by the Turks as brigands and by the Serbs as national heroes, their deeds being glorified and commemorated in many of the ballads which are still sung to-day. When caught by the Turks, they were mercilessly impaled alive.

We crossed the Serbian frontier at Gerghelli, and were not sorry to change trains, for the one on the Greek side had been so heavily fumigated that our eyes were watering all the way. They were very particular in Greece just then, and no doubt rightly, as to the disinfection of any one arriving from Serbia, and since every train made the return journey formalin was freely used.

At Gerghelli the traveller enters the country known as "New Serbia"—though "Old Serbia"

would be a more suitable appellation, since the Serb ruled here before the Turk, who surrendered this portion of his territory after the war of 1913, had been seen in Europe. Until it was opened up under the new rule, it was a land as little known to the outside world as the wilds of Central Africa. How could it be otherwise, when you could venture nowhere without an armed escort? To-day you may travel as you please on Serbian soil and run nothing beyond the ordinary risks—perhaps with the exception of parts of the Sandjak, a strip of land adjoining Albania and still populated by wild "Arnaut" tribes—but it was always a curious reflection to me that three years ago at Skoplje, where we used to wander about so freely, no one who did not sport the fez could venture, unattended, into certain parts of the towns, or, indeed, anywhere after dusk.

Since New Serbia has played so important a part in the present campaign, it may be well to define it a little more clearly. A glance at the map will show the extent of territory, some 35,000 kilometres, which fell to Serbia's lot when Bulgaria, most unwillingly, signed the treaty of peace at Bucharest. It was Bulgaria's pretensions to the larger portion of the territory—practically everything south of Skoplje—which had been won from the Turks by Serbia, and Serbia alone, that precipitated the second Balkan War.

The country is now divided into eleven depart-

ments, to wit: Skoplje, Monastir (Bitolj), Delra, Kavadar, Koumanovo, Novi Bazar, Prilip, Prizren, Prishtina, Tetova, and Istip. Each department is named after its principal town, and these cities, many of which it was our destiny to visit later on, are, as may be imagined, utterly different in type to those of Old Serbia.

This district, of course, comprises Serbian Macedonia, so fondly coveted by the Bulgars. From what I have seen of them, I should say that the Macedonians themselves were more inclined to the Bulgars than to the Serbs, and certainly I have met few Serbs who did not profess to despise the Macedonian. "C'est un Macédonien"—the phrase was frequently used of an undesirable person, and I can recall it particularly as applied by an officer friend of ours to his orderly, who deserted during the retreat.

As we journey to Skoplje we pass several places which, of no material interest to us at the time, became of the deepest importance later on when the fresh attack upon Serbia was begun. As we shall not pass this way again, I may as well set forth here the little I know of the Franco-British attempt at relief, which followed the railway line until it was effectively checked by the Bulgars. Our informant was Dr. Givadinovitch, of Skoplje, with whom we compared notes one day at Petch in Montenegro, where we found ourselves fellow-refugees. Since he had been at Skoplje, the first town of importance to fall to

the Bulgars, he naturally took the keenest interest in the movements of the Allies.

It was near Strumitza, then, that the first brush occurred between the Allied troops and the Bulgars. We ourselves, far away at Pirot at the time, had heard of this encounter with a dismay that may be imagined, for the news came—we refused to believe it—when we were confidently expecting to be told that the expected reinforcements had reached Nish. We knew that Nish had been decorated to give them fitting reception —yet here they were, scrapping with the Bulgars not many miles over the Greek frontier!

From Strumitza the French advanced to Krivolak, which is not much farther on, and here they concentrated. The next station on the railway is Gradsko, and it was upon the line Gradsko–Izvor that the French and the British, somewhere about November 7, in conjunction with the Serbs, met with a slight success—the only one to be recorded. Little blame to them. They may then have numbered some 100,000 men in all, and the forces in Serbia were totally inadequate in number for the task they had to perform. The Bulgars at this time were occupying Istip, and later, by threatening Prilip, they forced the Allied troops to retire, and once the retreat had begun it was continued until Salonika was regained.

This, as far as I can ascertain, is the complete history of what the Allies did by way of keeping their solemn obligation to help Serbia.

Farther up the line, at Veles—which the Turks called Kuprulu—there was some severe fighting between Serbs and Bulgars in the very early days of the war. The town lies on either bank of the River Vardar, and the left side fell early, while the right maintained a stubborn resistance.

Some one told me a story in connection with the fighting here, about an officer, a native of the town, who found it necessary to direct a heavy fire against his own house just across the river, although he was quite uncertain whether his wife and daughters had succeeded in making their escape from it or not. As he, with his regiment, was forced to retire, surrendering the rest of the town, he remained in tragic ignorance of the fate of his family.

The scenery along the railway is very typical and worth considering. It is a mountainous country, and now and again the line passes through narrow gorges between bold precipitous rocks. Let me try to recall some salient points —not forgetting that the conditions I describe are those of many months ago, when Serbia was little more than nominally at war.

You will notice a great lack of trees; there is never anything approaching to a wood or a forest. The reason is that the Turks cut them all down, and would never allow them to be replaced. When your hills are bare it is easier to see and track any insurgents that may be about.

There are few villages, and practically no

roads. The River Vardar, a swift turbulent stream, is never very far from the railway line, and to cross it by some of the existing bridges is rather an exciting experience. These bridges, broken in the Balkan War, have been but roughly repaired, and they shake and creak ominously as the train crawls across them. The sleepers are merely laid across the trestles, and if one looks out of the window one sees no bridge at all, but merely the foaming rushing water below.

There is little sign of human life among the hills. At ordinary times there would be none at all, but just now the line has to be guarded, so you will see sentries standing by their roughly made huts at regular distances. They are hardy peasants, old men for the most part, since it is the duty of the younger to fight, and their clothing is, generally speaking, pretty good evidence of the need Serbia has for outside assistance on behalf of her brave sons who are devoting their lives to their country. You will remark their shoes—they are hardly shoes in the ordinary sense of the word, just a leather sole, bound to the foot by crossed strands. Here and there you will see a soldier standing up, a solitary figure, on some steep mountain crag; he presents a picture that cannot fail to impress you—you will perhaps think of a lonely eagle on some pinnacle of rock, guarding its nest.

There are cranes and storks by the river-side, and bird life is abundant. We had the good fortune one day to be able to watch the flight of

quite a number of black ibis, the sacred bird of Ancient Egypt.

And flowers: if you are a botanist you will not regret a visit to New Serbia. You must not look for carefully tended gardens after the English pattern, though the Turk loves roses, and behind many a mean mud-plastered wall, could you see over it, you would find a perfect bower of fragrance. Here you must go out into the fields and on the hills. It is something to see, in the spring, along moist ground, the masses of yellow and white flag iris, the fields of snowdrops (we call them " snowflakes ") of the Balkans and Carpathians, the poppies, the love-in-a-mist (Nigella), the honeysuckle, brier roses, and a hundred other flowers so varied that they are beyond the ken of any one not trained to recognize them.

Besides the red field poppies you will find that the great purple opium-producing poppy is often a feature in the landscape. This flower is cultivated, and there is some trade in opium—for export purposes only.

For the rest, the fertile plains that lie between the more mountainous regions are not at present cultivated to one-quarter of their capability. The soil is excellent for most purposes, and the countryside is capable of tremendous agricultural development. To-day you will traverse great tracts of waste land where horses—half wild—great horned sheep and goats, shaggy pigs, buffaloes and oxen, wander more or less as they

please, all of which will, it is to be hoped, come one day under the plough. A better country for fruit-growing one could hardly desire. Cherries and apricots are abundant, and the Serbian plum is well known; but there is as yet little or no effort at methodical production. Little blame to Serbia, however, that this is so. She has not yet held the territory for three years, during which she has been recovering from one war only to be involved in another, and so all praise to her for what she has actually achieved. May she come back into her own!

From the frontier to Skoplje the train only passes one town of importance—Veles. You will see it at dusk as you emerge from the narrow gorge at the mouth of which it stands, and it will strike you as sombre and uninviting with its closely packed houses and mud walls, all alike heavily tiled with the large, dark, curved tiles that are characteristic of the country. The only relief comes from patches of green foliage—there are usually plenty of trees, almost invariably the acacia, inside a town if not without it—and from the white spires of minarets dotted here and there.

Such houses as you see closely will seem to you poor and squalid, but you must remember that nobody dared make any show of wealth in Turkish days for fear of official extortion—they did not even venture to whitewash their houses. You must remember, too, that Serbia does not profess to be an aristocratic country; it is

essentially a country of peasants; there are few even of the higher classes—not excluding the royal family—who did not spring originally from peasant stock. And one may say so without fear, for the Serb is not ashamed of his origin.

How could conditions well be other than they are? The day of proud princes and lords ended with the famous battle of Kossovo and the Turkish occupation. All who were great in the land were either slain or else they fled to other countries. The Serbians were herded into the villages, a downtrodden people.

This lasted for upwards of four hundred years. Then at last in 1804 came the first organized insurrection under Kara-George—the Black George—leader of a band of Hydooks, who was the ancestor of the present king. Under him and under his successor, Milosch Obrenovitch, leader of the second revolution, society began to be reorganized. Educated Serbians returned to the country from Hungary and elsewhere. Thus was formed the basis upon which the existing social conditions have been founded.

From Veles it is but a short run to Skoplje, the city which may be described as the Heart of New Serbia. No one can stay there long without realizing the great possibilities of development that it presents. I found that the municipality had already drawn up elaborate schemes.

"But surely," I argued, "these things are best put aside till after the war?"

" Oh, no," was the cheery reply. " Whatever happens, Skoplje will remain Serbian—Skoplje is not in the disputed territory. Our city will never fall to the Bulgars."

And no one dreamed then that Skoplje would be the first of all Serbian towns to fall.

CHAPTER III

SKOPLJE

SINCE there was no serious fighting in progress or anticipated for the moment, the Serbian military authorities decided that our unit should "mark time" at Skoplje, where we were given control of the 3rd Hospital.

The building was a commodious one, properly speaking the school or "gymnasium," but it had been applied to hospital purposes ever since the scourge of typhus was rampant in the land. Since we, however, only treated surgical cases, all others were transferred elsewhere before we took possession.

No part of the country, outside the zone of actual fighting, had been so sorely tried as Skoplje. We heard much as to the conditions there the preceding winter from our friend Dr. Givadinovitch, and from others who had lived through those terrible days. Dr. Givadinovitch reckoned that he was lucky to have come through with his life, for, indeed, there were many medical men, native and foreign, who sacrificed themselves at the shrine of duty. Very much of all this was reported in the English Press at the time, but however strong they might be, words could hardly

give adequate description of the horrors that prevailed.

Refugees from the north came crowding in, bringing pestilence and famine in their train. They had to be housed, but the city was already overcrowded. Every train discharged a pitiful cargo—the brave sons of Serbia who had been wounded on the battlefield—and though hospitals were rapidly improvised throughout the town, they were utterly insufficient to cope with the need. Medical necessities were lacking; doctors and nurses—the few that were available—worked themselves to death, literally to death, in their efforts to stem the horrid tide, but they were only drawn into the vortex themselves. Men died in the streets, for there were none to minister to them; fever and crying want held hideous revel, while the icy hand of winter lay heavy upon the land.

Conditions were better when we reached Skoplje, and this was owing to the brave men and women who toiled devotedly through those dark winter days to combat the grim spectre—they who went out fearlessly, their lives in their hands, and all too many of whom fell victims to their devotion.

A few of those who had fought this stern fight were still at Skoplje when we arrived. Lady Paget, convalescent from a severe attack of typhus, left for England a few days later, carrying with her the love and gratitude of the whole nation.

Of this we had a striking example in a few words spoken to us by a Jewish shopkeeper. "We Jews," he said, "kept our synagogue open for perpetual prayers while that brave English lady lay ill. Long hours together we spent bowed in prayer—even the little children." He paused, then added simply: "Perhaps our prayers were heard."

Perhaps—who knows? Anyway the man meant what he said, and the tribute, as much by the way it was spoken as by its actual significance, impressed us for the moment with a sense of pride that we were English too.

Lady Paget did not remain away from her work longer than she could help. We have heard that when, in October, the town was menaced by the Bulgars, she hurried to Salonika in order to beg for the immediate assistance of the Allied troops. Realizing that nothing could be done, she returned and put the question to her staff whether they would take to flight or stay with their sick, and the unanimous decision was that they should stay. And so they did; how they have fared in Bulgarian hands I have no means of learning.

Of Lady Paget and her hospital it is impossible to speak too highly. That the foreign "missions" to Serbia have, in many cases, laid themselves open to criticism no one who has had any experience of them can deny. It is always so—it was the case in Belgium, and, to go further back, it was the case in South Africa. But what

can one expect? With the best intentions in the world, faulty judgment is liable to occur, and it would be a remarkable thing if complete harmony invariably prevailed among the members, loosely disciplined as a rule, of any unit. So where, taking it all round, the good vastly outweighs the evil, it is merely invidious to carp and rail. One can, without any difficulty whatever, give examples of the fine work that has been achieved—and for that one need go no further than Lady Paget and her hospital at Skoplje.

For ourselves, then, we found at Skoplje no more than the lingering shadow of what had been; we arrived with the spring, and spring had breathed her soothing spirit over the town. Skoplje was beginning to smile once more, but wanly, as one who has known much pain.

Once installed at the hospital, there was plenty of work for the unit, though it was not altogether the sort of work upon which they had reckoned. They did not, for instance, expect to have to treat civilian out-patients, but since the need was great, the responsibility was most readily accepted, and there were many of us who regretted, especially in the case of sick children, that the hospital had to be reserved entirely for wounded soldiers.

The majority of these poor people came from the country, often from a long distance. The need of medical aid, at this time, was very sorely felt in the villages, so isolated for the most part that no doctor could possibly be forthcoming in case

of emergency, nor were any medical comforts to be procured. In this respect the most valuable aid was rendered by Mrs. Stobart, who organized travelling dispensaries. I have heard the chief of the Serbian medical staff speak of this lady and her indefatigable co-workers in terms of the highest praise.

We spent some six weeks in all at Skoplje, so we got to know the town very well, and we made many friends among its inhabitants, several of whom we were destined to meet again later on under very different circumstances. Nearly every one spoke French or German, and since we can get along pretty fluently with both these languages, there was never much difficulty in the way of social converse. Of course nobody liked talking German if they could help it, and one only had recourse to that language in case of absolute necessity.

Certainly there were times when an interpreter was needed, and the worst of Mr. Doklestitch in this capacity was that his English was occasionally weird and erratic. I have a vivid recollection of trying to take down some notes kindly provided for me by the Minister of Commerce, who spoke no language but his own, upon Mr. Doklestitch's translation. The difficulty was enhanced by the fact that there were also two or three ladies present who confused him in his efforts by holding an animated discussion on the subject of hats. The notes were given me for future reference, but it was no easy matter to make head or tail of them.

To General Damien Popovitch, who was in command of the whole forces of the New Territory, and to his charming wife, we owe much. There was no kindness that they were not ready to perform for us and for the unit. It is to General Popovitch that I am indebted for my commission in the Serbian army—an honorary commission, of course, but I was proud to be able to wear the Serbian uniform, and would not exchange it during the retreat, in spite of strong representations as to the advisability of doing so. As a matter of fact, other considerations apart, I found the uniform of great service to me.

Madame Popovitch was a leading member of the community of ladies that, in Serbia, represented the Red Cross. These ladies were indefatigable in work, and never spared themselves when the welfare of the country was to be considered. They set on foot and maintained many charitable institutions, in one of which—it was a home for orphan children—we had some reason to be specially interested.

It was because this particular institution was selected by Madame Popovitch to receive the proceeds derived from the performance of a little play which we had written for production at the Skoplje Theatre. It was a story of the war, Serbian, and of course intensely patriotic. It was called "The Vow," and it was translated into Serbian by our friend, M. Nusits—the gentleman who had adopted Soona—and who, besides being

a well-known writer himself, was also the manager of the theatre.

Of all our subsequent losses during the retreat there is nothing that we regret so much as the presents which we received from the ladies of Serbia on the production of this little play. Alice had a wreath in filigree silver, with an inscription engraved upon it, whilst I had a beautifully-got-up copy of the play, the cover being in fine native embroidery. These things we have lost, but I am glad to say I still retain the letter that was presented to us at the same time. It bears the signatures of the ladies, and, needless to say, we value it highly.

The acting of our little effort at Serbian drama was most creditable, and the conclusion was more moving than we ourselves had anticipated, for M. Nusits had introduced a crowd of soldiers who lined up and, together with the principals—under the Serbian flag held aloft by the hero—sang the national hymn, thus bringing the whole audience to their feet.

The hero—Marco, we called him—was himself a soldier, and I had to appeal to General Popovitch that he should be allowed an extension of time before joining his regiment in order that he might act in subsequent performances. I had a letter from him later from "somewhere on the frontier," and we met him, as we met so many others, during the retreat. It was while we were on the way to Prishtina and in some difficulty that Marco turned up as a very friend in need.

Of General Popovitch I shall have occasion to speak again. The war wrought tragedy to him as to so many others. Poor M. Nusits we met at Prizren the following November; he came up and spoke to us, for we should not have recognized him. He was a broken man since his son was killed in action.

Skoplje is a town of great antiquity and interest, though it contains to-day but few really ancient buildings. History tells us that there was a magnificent city here as far back as the second century, and that it was the favourite residence of Constantine the Great. A great earthquake wrought havoc in 518, after which the town was rebuilt by Justinian. The Serbs took Skoplje—Scopion, as it was then called—from the Byzantines in 1282. This was during the reign of the great Tsar Miloutine, who, like his even more illustrious grandson, Tsar Douchan, strove to unite the scattered Serbian people into one great nation.

Tsar Douchan still remains the greatest figure in all Serbian history; practically speaking he was the only king before the Turkish conquest who reigned over the whole country. Certainly he dominates Skoplje. The remains of his ancient fortress are still to be traced among the more modern buildings—at present hospitals and barracks—which crown the hill round which the older parts of the town are grouped, and the handsome bridge across the turbulent Vardar bears his name.

Serbian prosperity was at its height during this period. Tsar Douchan and the Tsarina Yelina were crowned at Skoplje—the coronation chair is still to be seen in the church of San Spasa. Here, too, Serbia's first Constitution was drawn up and brought before a regular Parliament; it was a wise and beneficial code which is still regarded as a monument to Douchan's greatness as a king.

Unfortunately Douchan died when he was at the summit of his power, and his son Urosh was too young and too weak to hold the varied elements of the new kingdom together. This has always been the case in the history of the Balkans; the strong man, to whichever nationality he might belong, was never able to find a successor of equal strength.

Urosh was murdered by one of his generals, a certain Vukashin, who usurped the throne and did his utmost, with the greatly diminished forces at his command, to withstand the invasion of the Turk, which by now had become a menace of the utmost gravity. He was, however, defeated and murdered in his turn.

And then arose a great popular hero, Tsar Lazar. He was chosen by the Serbs to lead them against the Turks. The growing danger was appreciated by now, and Lazar was able to gather together the great chieftains from all the surrounding nations. The flower of the nobility of the whole land ranged itself by his side.

With a great army he met the Turks, who were

led by the Sultan Amurath, Murad I., on the historic plain of Kossovo—historic because it was the scene of one of the decisive battles of the world.

There is a legend that, praying in the church of Gratchaniza—built by Tsar Miloutine upon the plain of Kossovo—before the battle, Lazar was offered by an angel his choice of an earthly or a heavenly crown. He chose the latter. Unfortunately for his choice it was not he alone who fell in the great battle that ensued, for practically the whole of the Serbian nobles who had rallied under his standard were wiped out as well. The victory was to the Turk.

But the victory was due to treachery. Lazar's son-in-law, Vook—which means wolf—deserted to the enemy with a large following, whom he had deceived with the belief that they were carrying out a necessary manœuvre. This was the turning-point which proved fatal to the Serb.

It is said that the ground upon which the deserters stood has been barren from that day to this; it is also said that there is a red flower, sprung from the blood of the slain, that grows upon the battlefield and nowhere else in the world. This flower is picked and sold on the anniversary of the battle, which was fought on June 15th, 1389.

It was, by the way, in May that we paid a visit to Gratchaniza and Kossovo, and the flower was not then in bloom. From the appearance

of the plant, however, which was pointed out to me, I guessed it to be a sort of wild peony.

The Turks suffered nearly as heavily as their opponents. Sultan Murad was killed in his tent by a Serbian Voyvoda named Milosch, who had been suspected by his fellow-officers of contemplating treason. Milosch lost his own life, but the means he had taken to prove his innocence enshrined him for ever as a national hero. His grave is still shown at Kossovo, as is that of Sultan Murad. The whole region has thus become holy ground both to Serbs and Turks, and the exultant joy of the former may be imagined when, at last, after many centuries, their own has been restored to them once more.

The black garments which appear so prominently in the national dress of the Montenegrin women of to-day are supposed to be derived from the mourning worn for the heroes who died at Kossovo.

It is impossible to touch upon this period of Balkan history without some mention of the most famous of all the national heroes of Serbia. This was Marco, son of Vukashin—the same Vukashin who murdered Urosh. It is hopeless to attempt, with limited space, to give any adequate idea of the romantic tales that have accumulated round the name of this "King Arthur" of Serbia—they would alone fill a substantial volume, and might well have provided material for Malory or Tennyson. I took copious notes on the subject, while at Skoplje, from a

book kindly lent to me by Madame Givadinovitch, and also of other stories which were told to me, for, indeed, the study of these ancient ballads is one of the greatest interest. Unfortunately these particular notes have gone the way of my other possessions.

A few words, then, must suffice. It was due to Marco that Urosh became king at all. After the death of Douchan the throne was contested by Vukashin and two other powerful despots. It was not known definitely whom the great king had appointed to succeed him. Marco was summoned to Kossovo to give a decision, since he had been secretary to the late monarch, and he gave it adversely to his father, in favour of the legitimate heir. So angry was Vukashin that he pursued his son round the church of Gratchaniza with the intention of killing him, but the closed doors opened of their own accord, and Marco found refuge within. Vukashin then struck his sword through the door, thinking thus to reach his son, and withdrawing it stained with blood concluded he had effected his purpose. Overcome with remorse, he burst into tears, but a voice spoke to him from the church, assuring him that Marco was unhurt—it was the angel of God who had borne the blow in his place.

After the battle of Kossovo Marco became a suzerain of the Sultan, whom he served faithfully, although I find in my notes that "he drank wine freely to annoy the Turks." He had a

wonderful horse, striped like a zebra, which took part in his exploits and was gifted with human intelligence. Marco reigned at Prilep, which is to the south-west of Skoplje, and there the remains of his ancient fortress are still to be seen. He is reputed to be lying there, in a cave, asleep, and tradition had it that he would awake when the land was freed from Turkish yoke.

I inquired, laughingly, if anything had been seen of the hero when Prilep was retaken in 1913, and was told that the Serbian soldiers who routed the Turks at that place had energetically declared that they were actually led to victory by Marco himself, who, upon his famous horse, had placed himself at their head. My informant declared that he had heard this story many a time, and that there had been a published account of it.

Skoplje, or Uskub, became an important city under Turkish rule. In the sixteenth century it contained 30,000 houses and did a big trade in hides, which were shipped at Durazzo and Salonika. In the following century, however, it was completely destroyed by fire by the order of the Austrian general Piccolamini, who had captured the city from the Turks. The Skoplje that we know to-day has arisen from the ashes of the past.

A knowledge of these historical details was rather necessary to us when we paid a visit to Kossovo and Gratchaniza. It is a journey of three or four hours by train from Skoplje on the

branch line to Mitrovitza. The present Sultan of Turkey is to be thanked for the building of this line—as far, at least, as Prishtina, which is the station for all the points of importance on the famous plain. He had the line constructed in order that he might go on formal pilgrimage to the tomb of Murad, and it seems part of the irony of things that soon after—on October 13th, 1913—the Crown Prince Alexander of Serbia should have marched into Skoplje at the head of a conquering army.

It is a journey replete with interest. The line penetrates between the great Shar Mountains, dominated by their monarch, Luboten, whose outline is not unlike that of the Matterhorn, and whose summit is covered by perpetual snow. This great mountain stands guard over the gorge of Katchenik, where the Turkish giant, Moussa Kessedgi, who had three hearts, was slain by Marco; upon the third heart was found a sleeping serpent. And if you are so incredulous as not to believe this story, the tomb of Moussa Kessedgi, at the outlet of the gorge, will be pointed out to you as a proof of its truth.

But the Katchenik Pass has a far deeper interest to us to-day—an interest of which we knew nothing when we journeyed through it for pleasure on our way to Kossovo. There was very severe fighing in this region at the end of the following October, and after the capture of Skoplje by the Bulgars. How the latter contrived to force the pass I do not know, but force it

they did, for it was at the outlet, on the Kossovo side, that the big battle took place.

It was a memorable battle—if only for one reason. Prishtina was threatened and might easily have fallen even at this early stage of the war, and had Prishtina fallen then there would have been no great retreat at all, for the one way left open to the Serbian army would have been cut off, and there would have been no course left to the country but to surrender unconditionally. We ourselves should certainly have been prisoners of the Bulgars or Germans.

But Prishtina did not fall at this time. Warning was received at the crucial moment, and General Boiovitch, with the Armée de la Morave du Sud, appeared in the field and succeeded in driving the Bulgars back with considerable slaughter. It was night, and the moon was at its full; one can imagine what the battle must have been in that wild mountainous region.

The Serbians fighting in Macedonia always gave a good account of themselves. Early in November, under Colonel Vassitch, they scored a further success—this time on the road to Monastir, a town which they had hoped to possess themselves of quite early in the campaign, but which did not actually fall till last of all. This was a three days' battle, and the Serbs were enormously outnumbered.

Yet I have been asked in all seriousness if Serbia made any attempt to defend herself!

But all these things were undreamt of when we made our journey through the Katchenik Gorge to Prishtina, nor did we guess under what sort of conditions we should return to the plain of Kossovo.

I do not know whether the fine Byzantine church of Gratchaniza, standing alone upon the plain, interested us largely, though we gazed with respectful admiration at the frescoes of Tsar Miloutine, the founder, and of his brother Dragoutine. The latter married Helen of Anjou, and it was this French princess and her *demoiselles d'honneur* who first instructed the women of Serbia in the art of embroidery—an art which they have never lost, as their national dress of to-day may prove.

Most of the pictured portraits on the walls of the church have had their eyes gouged out—a gentle mark of disapprobation on the part of the Turk.

We were more interested to find ourselves guests at a wedding which was in progress. The bride was very young, only sixteen, and delightfully shy. She was dressed in white brocade, and wore a veil and wreath of orange blossoms, also a curious and somewhat heavy cloak of pale yellow brocade, edged with brown fur. The respective mothers of bride and bridegroom wore old heirloom dresses of stiff yellow and crimson satin, and aprons and kerchiefs that were one mass of rich embroidery; they carried any amount of quaint jewellery too.

We would willingly have stayed longer than we were able to, for the wedding customs of Serbia are quaint and original. These people, however, were not of the peasant class, so we should hardly have witnessed a typical example. There was, for instance, no firing of rifles, which is the usual accompaniment of the wedding festivities.

But feasting there was—a most ample meal. The mayor of the town had ordered a special repast for us, but after the hospitality of our new friends we were unable to do justice to it. What did it matter that the dishes were handed round anyhow, whether you were sitting at the table or not, or that for want of knife and fork you had to help yourself with your fingers? Somehow it seemed quite natural to do so.

Dancing started later in the afternoon under the shelter of the grey wall that circled the church, the bridegroom leading out the bride, while a gipsy band provided inspiring music. In the intervals of the dance, food—hot roast lamb!—and wine were pressed lavishly upon the guests.

The dance was, of course, the "Kolo." This dance is best seen at some village fête, though society does not by any means disdain it. It is unlike anything we know. Partners are not chosen, but hands are joined and every one comes in just as he or she chooses, at any time, and at any place in the line. The movement is slow and rhythmic, two paces to the right and one to the left, or vice versa—it is in reality more com-

plicated than that, but the description may stand —so that there is always a certain progress in one direction or the other. A straight line is never kept, the leader making a point of introducing queer turns and evolutions, and thus when there are many dancers the general effect is that of a serpentine coil, twining or untwining according to the sway of the music. The latter is quite characteristic, usually provided by gipsy musicians clad in wonderful and many-coloured raiment; and if the village people, too, are wearing their national dress—the most graceful and becoming of any of the varied costumes one sees in the Balkans—the picture provided is not easily forgotten.

At present the national dress is still pretty generally worn. It is of white wool, with very characteristic embroidery in black or very dark blue. The aprons may be of brighter hue, usually red, but the dark embroidery of the main dress is persistent.

It will be a pity if these graceful dresses should tend to disappear. There is a danger of this in the ready market with foreign visitors that the peasants find for their garments—often heirlooms in their families for generations. At Skoplje fair every Tuesday one may see plenty offered for sale, and one could pick up a beautiful embroidered specimen for well under a pound.

We were really sorry when we had to leave the wedding party. They were still dancing happily when we drove away, and the last we



Photo *Underwood & Underwood*

THE FAIR AT SKOPLJE

saw of them was the "koom"—as I think he is called—the master of ceremonies, who had followed us with a bottle of wine in order to keep up the hospitality to the very end.

Our long stay at Skoplje was due to the continued cessation of hostilities. There was no prospect of any advance in the north, since, other considerations apart, the floods on the Danube were only slowly subsiding. Our special services as a field hospital could not therefore as yet be called in.

I do not think that any of us regretted our stay. Skoplje, in its queer mixture of modernity with the old lethargic methods of the Turk, endeared itself amazingly. It was unlike anything that one had seen before. Even the incessant croaking of frogs along the river bank, so disturbing at first, became almost musical to one's memory because of its association with the town.

Since, however, Skoplje is actually in a transition state, putting aside much of her former characteristics, I would hardly describe the town as typical of those of New Serbia. I would sooner take Tetova as an example—Kalkandelen as the Turks called it.

This town lies some thirty odd miles due west from Skoplje, close to the Albanian frontier, and as many miles from any railway station. For this reason it is hardly yet in the interesting transition state which you will find at Skoplje. The new regime has not set its mark upon Tetova

to anything like the same extent. It remains to-day very much as it has been for the last few hundred years.

We will drive to Tetova one day from Skoplje, starting very early in the morning, and selecting a Tuesday for choice, as then, though there will be a good deal of obstruction to our progress, we shall be able to see quite a lot of life and character. The natives from the surrounding villages are trooping down to the Skoplje fair.

They come singly, in small groups or in large companies—a motley crowd. A few ride horses, mules, or donkeys, but for the most part they come on foot, patiently trudging many miles, using their beasts for the transport of their goods. And what a commotion ensues when the car comes hooting in sight!

They are usually on the wrong side of the road, and they cannot make up their minds whether they should remain where they are or cross over. Some do one thing and some the other, and the result is confusion. Many of them have never seen a motor-car in their lives, and they stand staring, in stupid amazement, at the unwonted sight.

There is a babel of voices. Now and then a horse may turn restive, and its owner will jump down and cover its eyes with his hat, or he will ride it off the road altogether, even climbing a steep bank in his anxiety to get out of the way. Donkeys, stubborn and braying, are pulled or pushed from the position which they seem to adopt

for choice—immediately in front of the approaching car—and at last a clear path is made. Almost invariably good humour prevails, it is but very rarely that one is greeted by anything approaching a scowl. As for the Turk, it is impossible to know what he is thinking about—his face is always set and inscrutable.

Tetova lies on the slope of a steep hill, and the general vista of the town, seen from above, is typical of this part of the country. There are the usual groups of low houses, with their heavily tiled roofs, interspersed with patches of dark foliage. The main part of the town is still Turkish, and so the characteristic methods of the Turk prevail. You find narrow winding streets, horribly paved with cobble-stones, one-storied buildings, and tiny windowless stores where the owner sits and plies his trade, whatever it may be, in the view of the passer-by, patiently and solemnly following out the same methods that his forefathers pursued hundreds of years ago.

It is herein that you will find the main difference between towns like Skoplje and Tetova. Skoplje progresses—and will progress. Tetova, at present, stands still. At Skoplje the Turk is gradually withdrawing to his own special quarter or leaving the neighbourhood altogether; if he continues to reside in one of the main streets, sitting cross-legged in his little store, and watching the decline of his business, it is because circumstances have not as yet permitted him to move.

He has been allowed three years in which to decide whether he will go or become naturalized, and the time has not yet expired. Nevertheless he despises the glass-windowed shops which are springing up around him, though you would not guess it from his expression or from anything that he may say—he is always polite and benign, and will offer you a cup of coffee and a cigarette, and haggle with you over his goods, quite regardless of changed political and social conditions.

Even in Turkish days there was always a considerable Serbian and Albanian population at Tetova. You will find the former still living in their own quarter, high up the hill, where, after rain, the narrow streets are converted into veritable torrents, so that deep furrows are dug out, and even walking is a matter of difficulty.

The people are of the poorest, but at present they do not beg, not even from the travelling stranger, their natural prey. You will certainly be surrounded by swarms of children and others, especially if you have arrived in so little known a vehicle as a motor-car—absolutely unknown in many places that we have visited—but it is merely curiosity that draws them together. The only actual beggars that you will come across in New Serbia are Turkish women and children, and there are not many of them. The women have a peculiarly aggravating sing-song whine; they stretch out claw-like hands, and their faces are covered by the yashmak, so that as a rule one sees nothing but the projection of a thin,

pinched nose. The children approach you silently; they have a quite remarkable pathos of expression which would certainly touch your heart if you did not know it to be trained and unreal.

Perhaps it will interest you to glance into one of these Serbian hill-side houses. You can do so without hesitation, for the crowd of hangers-on will acquit you of evil intentions, and the old lady sitting in the doorway spinning will probably give a smiling assent.

You will at first be puzzled to realize that you are in a house at all, for you find yourself standing on a sort of scaffolding, with boards so roughly put together that they provide a very precarious foothold. As you have chosen a house on the side where the hill falls you will be on the top floor, and you will find a ladder leading down to depths below. But there, as above, the house has no walls to speak of save at one point, which constitutes the sleeping-room—and how many sleep in that room it would be unwise to conjecture. These open floors you will find pretty constantly in the villages of New Serbia. They remind one somehow of the habitations of prehistoric lake-dwellers; are, of course, delightfully cool in summer, and doubtless, on the whole, more healthy than the astonishing gipsy edifices which one is bound to find on the outskirts of towns in this part of the world, and which are knocked together from any old pieces of boarding, scrap iron, or lumber that the owner may have possessed himself of.

You must not leave Tetova without visiting the Turkish monastery, a delightful oasis of peace and forgetfulness. It is a remarkable spot, for Turks, not loving the life celibate, rarely become monks. You will find a number of low, cool buildings, spotlessly clean and with matted floors, standing in a garden where flowers abound and where little streams and fountains bubbling from the ground or from the rock meet you at every turn. In a wooden structure, a sort of open pavilion, built round one of these fountains, the brothers, of whom there are at present sixteen, teach the children of the neighbourhood; like the monks of other denominations, they are ready to offer welcome and hospitality to the stranger within their gates. And one can hardly imagine a more ideal retreat for any one who wishes to shut himself off for a while from the turbulent world outside.

What will be Skoplje's fate in the future—when she has thrown off the shackles of the hated Bulgar? Let us try to picture it by considering first what Skoplje looks like to-day—forgetting for the moment that the enemy is within her gates.

We know the tortuous, narrow streets, horribly paved with rough cobble-stones, which, three years ago, were roofed over according to the Turkish fashion of the bazaar; we know the unpretentious modern houses and cafés that line the river banks; we know the lack of good hotel accommodation, of drainage, of lighting,

of this and that that go to fulfil present-day ideas of comfort; yet none of these things can prevent our imagination dwelling upon the Skoplje of to-morrow, a Skoplje restored, in great measure, to its ancient fame and beauty.

Beauty it has already, together with the greatest natural advantages. A finer site for a city can hardly be imagined. In the centre of a fertile plain, 247 metres above sea-level, and with the soil of the richest; protected on three sides by hills and mountains, among which are some of the loftiest that the Balkans can boast, intersected by the fine River Vardar, whose swift current is as yet uncontrolled; replete with historic and legendary interest; a junction for many high roads; possessing a water-supply of the purest, a water conduit which was fashioned by the Romans of old, and which is as serviceable to-day as it was then; a climate that is agreeable nearly all the year round—what more can be desired?

And so it is not hard to picture the Skoplje of to-morrow, the Skoplje that will begin to arise when peace is once more restored to the land. It will be a city of broad boulevards and handsome buildings, a harmonious blending of East and West. Its colour, its life, its character will not be lost—they will be enhanced.

But for the moment we must be content with Skoplje as we remember her.

CHAPTER IV

MLADENOVATZ

WHEN the First British Field Hospital for Serbia was, in due course, transferred to Mladenovatz it came into direct touch with the Second Army which was quartered there. And, naturally, when the order came to hand that we should go north to join the army to which we were attached, we were one and all convinced that great events were pending, and that our energies were at last going to be employed in the direction for which they were intended.

Possibly it was so. Serbia had been devoting her utmost energy to the reorganization of her army after the tremendous gaps that had been made in it by war and disease. Of this we had already had plenty of evidence while we were at Skoplje. Day after day we had seen the young conscripts collecting and marching through the town—very bravely they marched too, singing as they went, not in happy-go-lucky fashion, anyhow and each for himself, but in perfect time and rhythm. And we used to see them at the station too, packing close as sardines into the open trucks that were to convey them to one or another of the military centres where they

would be equipped and trained. Certainly Serbia had not been wasting her time; she realized the great task that was hers in the world war, and she did not mean to fail in her duty to her Allies or to herself.

Every day we had some example of the spirit of patriotism that animates the whole country. I recall a visit we paid, on invitation, to a village called Banjani—the main object being to inspect a curious old monastery which has a church dedicated to St. Elie, hidden away in the fastness of the rock, so that services could be held there undisturbed by the Turkish oppressor.

It is interesting to note, in parentheses, that many of the old churches in Serbia are subterranean. The Turks would not allow their Christian subjects to erect any lofty edifice—bell towers were most strictly prohibited. The church of San Spaša, at Skoplje, is a good example. You would never dream that you are entering such an edifice until you have descended the stairs and stand within it.

But to return to Banjani. We were received by the mayor of the village, a fine sturdy old peasant, and by a crowd of women, all most picturesquely clad in the typical native dress. There were plenty of children too, looking just like a procession of gaily attired dolls as they came hand in hand down the narrow, stony, and exceedingly steep street, their little brown, naked feet taking no hurt from the rough stones. The girls all wore the brightly coloured aprons that

their mothers tie about their own waists; some of the toddling babies had their brown hair tightly braided round their wee heads, others wore caps embroidered in silk—one or two of the elder girls had their hair flowing free under a cotton kerchief. Our motors—perhaps we ourselves—were objects of exceeding wonder to them, for these were a very primitive people; they had lived, a Christian community, isolated in their village during the centuries of Turkish domination, uneducated but self-dependent and having their own code of laws. The new regime, however, had now taken them in hand and brought them, so to speak, into the pale of civilization. There are many such villages in New Serbia, villages that have only been "discovered" within the last three years, and the natives of which might almost be on the social level of some Central African tribe. They have their traditions, however, handed down from father to son, their own peculiar ethics, and these have kept them on a higher plane. Above all, they have never forgotten that they are Serbs.

There was hardly a man in that village, certainly not one much under the age of sixty. In spite of the independent spirit that animated the community, one and all had answered their country's call. And the women, with some of whom we conversed through our interpreter, told us how glad and proud they were that it should be so. They were illiterate folk, but a

young officer who was with us commented upon the almost poetic phrasing of their speech.

He repeated what one of them had said. Her son, who was but eighteen, had been loath to leave her alone to the heavy farm work. He did not like to desert his mother.

"I told him," she said simply, "that he might go without fear or regret, for it was his mother who called him to her. Is he not Serbia's son?"

Our friend had more to say about the fine spirit of patriotism that, almost universally, animates the women of Serbia. He was very anxious that we should lay stress upon this with our English readers.

"We have drunk in patriotism with our mother's milk," he said. "At our mother's knee we have been taught that our country has a claim upon us superior to all other claims; as children we burned to avenge Serbia and her wrongs—to free her—and now that we are men should we neglect our opportunities? It is the women of Serbia who have inspired us, who have buckled on our swords; it is to the women that our victories are due, for every mother has reared her son to be a soldier."

The Serbian women have not only sped their men into the battlefield; they have also taken men's work upon their own shoulders. All the tilling and sowing and planting—most of the farm labour—were being performed by the peasant women; they, too, were doing their duty by their mother—which is Serbia.

We were amused by one old woman with whom we conversed that day. She was so shrivelled up that she looked as if she must be at least a hundred. She was a widow—she had lost both her husband and her son in the last war, and now her grandsons had left her, but, as she explained, she would not have kept them back for any amount of silver or gold. She was, however, desperately anxious that we should look after them and nurse them most carefully if they happened to be wounded. She seemed to think it an assured fact that they would come under our charge.

Sometimes, many months later, when we saw young soldiers dead or dying by the wayside, buried perhaps unnamed, our thoughts would revert to those brave women of Banjani. The ghastly irony of it! Perhaps that old woman's grandsons may have perished thus—and she would never know.

By the time we reached Mladenovatz the Serbian army was probably near its full strength again. The country had some 280,000 men when the war with Austria commenced; at the start of the first Balkan War she had 430,000—but after three years of almost uninterrupted fighting that was hardly a figure to be attained to again. It must be remembered that Serbia in such a war as that upon which she has been engaged has no reserve. They were all called up, even to "the last defence"—which means boys of fifteen and sixteen and old men of sixty.

Also a great number of soldiers returned to the colours weakened by sickness; we ourselves came across old typhus cases to whom the term "convalescent" could hardly be applied with propriety. It is little wonder that the subsequent mortality has been so great.

Whatever we may have expected when we went to Mladenovatz, we were doomed to be disappointed. The victorious Russian advance, upon which we had been relying, was checked, and the check was followed by reverse after reverse. This put a different aspect upon things, for it was not likely that Serbia, unaided, should attempt to cross the Danube and attack her powerful foe.(' , ..t.. ..)

It seemed pretty clear that the contrary was more likely to be the case. "When they've done with the Russians they'll give Belgrade a turn," prophesied one of our officer friends. "It's simply a matter of when they can spare the men. You'll have work enough to do presently."

This grim forecast was in answer to some one who was grumbling at the enforced inactivity.

Lack of work was a subject which by this time had become rather acute among the foreign "missions" in Serbia. The simple fact was that there were too many of them. Hard-working committees in London and elsewhere were still busy in equipping and sending out efficient medical units, the members of which, in many cases, had given up useful and valuable positions

in order to help Serbia. There was much natural disappointment among these when they found that there was no real call for their services—at any rate for the moment. Nor could any one say definitely how long they might have to wait.

There was no longer any severe strain upon the hospitals. Many of them, like the one where we had worked at Skoplje, had been closed. Only old " chronic " cases remained in the wards. Serbia's soldiers were once more in excellent fettle, and the country was no longer plague-ridden.

No doubt work in plenty could have been found among the civilian population. I have already mentioned the need for medical aid in the villages, especially in those which happened to be remote. And even in the cities there was insufficient—if any—accommodation for women and children. Our out-patient practice at Skoplje —while it lasted—was immensely appreciated.

But it was not for work such as this that the various foreign units had been organized. They had come to help the Serbian army in warfare, and they did not see the sense of undertaking work which they might just as well be doing at home. As for the villages, the " missions " were not equipped for that kind of service, and the need that existed in this direction was really one for the internal organization of the country; Serbia herself would remedy this need when peace was restored to the land.

Such was the position of the "missions" in Serbia in the summer of the year. A tendency set in towards breaking up. Many surgeons and nurses, feeling that they were wasting their time, or that they might be more usefully employed elsewhere, resigned from their units and went home.

The Serbian authorities viewed this tendency with some distress. They, at least, were by no means anxious to dismiss their guests. Why were we depriving them of services that they might have need of any day? Let the influx be arrested by all means, but let them retain intact the units that were already in the country.

These representations were made to us pretty strongly when the tendency towards disintegration set in in our own unit. We had been for quite a time without serious work, and pleasant as was our camp life, there was a strong feeling among our surgeons and nurses that they should be more busily employed.

Several did actually resign; the majority ended with a compromise. They returned to Skoplje, where they found work at one or other of the hospitals. Captain Armstrong accompanied an American expedition into Albania for the purpose of inoculating the troops engaged in that country—Serbia at this time was occupying Durazzo. I had made arrangements to accompany him, but to my great disappointment eventually found it impossible, owing to other work, to leave Mladenovatz. It was, of course, definitely understood that the whole unit should

be re-formed as soon as the situation demanded it. Towards the end of our stay at Mladenovatz our camp, at first quite a considerable one, accommodating some forty people, was reduced to perhaps a dozen.

The whole question as to the advisability or the reverse of breaking up the British units in Serbia was discussed, I believe, at a meeting called by Sir Ralph Paget at Kraguejevatz, and it was decided that they should remain in the country. The decision was amply justified, for the fresh attack upon Serbia was made very soon afterwards. Nobody could foresee the debacle that was to defeat all hospital endeavour and put an untimely end to the long-expected work almost before it had well begun.

We had a bad time of it when we first reached Mladenovatz. We pitched our camp—for we were to live under canvas now—in an unfavourable spot. It was in a picturesque valley with a little stream running through it, but we very soon found that after rain the valley became a swamp, the stream a river. We had hardly got settled before there came a big storm which literally washed us out. Before we knew where we were we found ourselves wading, more than ankle deep in water, while our various belongings, not yet unpacked, went floating merrily away upon voyages of discovery on their own account. Everything was drenched through, and a more wretched crowd than we must have presented during the next twenty-four hours it would be

difficult to imagine. The lightning during this storm was particularly vivid, and one of our chauffeurs had a narrow escape of being struck; as it was he was thrown to the ground and rendered unconscious for a few moments.

These heavy storms are of not infrequent occurrence in Serbia. They are usually accompanied by a tremendous gale of wind. They will often come up quite suddenly—with the very shortest warning. Hurrying round the camp to hammer in tent-pegs was one of the tasks for which we always had to be prepared; without such care the smaller tents might very easily have been blown bodily away.

There was another danger of which we were warned when we had eventually settled down—in a large field, and on high ground this time—which was that our white tents would serve as excellent targets for attack by enemy aeroplanes. But the various methods of dealing with the trouble did not appeal to us, and we preferred to run the risk. We met with no accident, though I believe that the camp of the Scottish Women's Hospital, not far from our own, received unwelcome enemy attention soon after the general attack had begun.

The Staff of the Second Army was quartered very near us, and friendly relations were soon established. Their earliest manifestation was in the fulfilment of a desire very keenly felt by most of our people—especially the ladies; it was a desire to have horses to ride.

Our new friends lent us horses. They used to send half a dozen or so round to the camp morning and afternoon, and of course they would also ride themselves as opportunity occurred. Many pleasant expeditions were thus undertaken, and I imagine that Serbia provides no happier memories to our unit than were afforded by those rides.

Two horses were particularly endeared to us personally. They were the property of Captain Gwozditch, who was aide-de-camp to the Staff, and who became our intimate friend. The horses were both handsome chargers; Herzig, the mare, was Alice's favourite while we were at Mladenovatz, but Herzig was unfortunately not available for us during the retreat, and so she had to ride the white horse, Pigeon, who succeeded during those hideous days in winning a very warm corner in the affections of both of us.

Herzig was an Austrian charger. She had been captured by Captain Gwozditch at the battle of Zer after her owner was killed.

The battle of Zer was one that we heard a great deal of. It was fought against the Austrians in August 1914, and resulted in a triumph for the Serbs. It was particularly memorable, because the Serbs were not only outnumbered, but appeared at first to be at a disadvantage, the enemy descending upon them from three sides and in favourable position. Captain Gwozditch told us of a remarkable duel which he witnessed in the course of this battle, and which is perhaps

rather typical of the Serbian spirit—for both combatants were, literally speaking, Serbs, though one of them, a Czech, was fighting on the Austrian side.

The trenches were very close together, and during a lull in the fighting there had been a certain amount of rough "badinage" between them. The Serbs had, perhaps, called upon the Czechs to remember their common Slavonic origin. This wordy warfare was conducted on the Serbian side by a non-commissioned officer who was quite of the Cyrano de Bergerac type—possessed of a keen wit and utterly careless of his life. He found a worthy opponent in a sergeant on the other side.

And at last the Serb issued a challenge. He would expose himself above the trench and allow his adversary to have the first shot at him, if the Czech would undertake, supposing his shot miscarried, to be fired at in his turn and under the same conditions..

"Only remember that I shoot to kill," exclaimed Cyrano, who was reckoned the finest shot in his regiment.

The Czech agreed—he could hardly have refused. Cyrano stood up, laughing, and there was a breathless lull along the trenches on both sides, for every one had got to know what was happening.

The sergeant fired—without result. Amid the acclamations of his companions the Serb leisurely took up his gun.

"I'm afraid you missed me," he remarked

placidly. Upon which he fired at his adversary, who conscientiously kept his part of the bargain. But this bullet, too, failed to find its billet. The Czech stood unscathed.

"Again?" queried Cyrano—and from his place the other man nodded assent.

And so the whole operation was repeated, but this time the end was different. The Serb was once again untouched, but the Czech fell, mortally wounded. And then Cyrano, true to his type, flung down his gun and quite careless of exposing himself to possible revenge, ran across the intervening space and fell on his knees by the side of the man whom he had shot.

The latter was dying, but he had time to grasp the Serb by the hand.

"It was all fair and square," he muttered. "I bear you no ill-will."

They were his last words. As for the Serb, he was allowed, without molestation, to return to his lines, and presently the battle was raging again as furiously as ever.

It was the Serbian artillery that won them the battle of Zer—which is contrary to what has usually occurred. It is, as a rule, in their infantry attacks that the Serbs excel, and in all the recent fighting they had the best of it whenever the infantry got its chance. Unfortunately that was not often, for the Germans appreciated that their strength lay in their artillery and in their 31 cm. guns, and did not expose their men more than they could help.

It is one of the tragic features of the war that the Serbs should have had so many of their actual kinsmen in the ranks against them. I do not refer to the Bulgars, who are not even Slavs —the often-applied term "fratricidal war" is absurd—but to the Czechs, the Croats, the Dalmatians, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are all more or less allied in origin to the Serb, and, in any case, have no racial connection whatever with Austria. The Teutonic Austrians, in fact, form a very small part of the population of their own country.

But the Austrian discipline is severe, and as a rule their Serbian subjects fought well upon their side—though I have heard rumours of disaffection, especially among the Czechs, who were often ready to yield if they got an opportunity.

We saw a great deal, especially during the retreat, of a young Serb who had been an Austrian officer, but whose heart was with his own people, and who had come over to their side at a rather critical juncture. He was given a commission in the Serbian army and was also employed in the secret service—for Serbia was at all times overrun with spies.

I remember an occasion—at Nish—when I was looked upon with some suspicion myself, for I happened to be talking German in rather a low tone of voice with an amiable stranger who had entered into conversation with me. It needed some explanation to put myself right.

There were many stories told of Serbians who

happened to be Austrian subjects and who died rather than serve against the country of their birth. The most poignant was, perhaps, that of a certain young Dalmatian, named Grozentitz, who was first officer on an Austrian ship, and who had served the country of his adoption very faithfully and with great distinction. When the war broke out, however, he was suspected of Serbian sympathies, and it was believed that he was connected with a certain plot which had been revealed to the authorities. He was questioned, but refused to give any answer, nor would he utter a word when he was given the choice of taking an oath of allegiance to the Emperor or being shot there and then. The exhortations of his comrades and of the priest had no effect upon him. Not even the presence of his weeping mother could induce him to hesitate.

The riflemen were thereupon ordered to do their duty. The young man stood up calmly, and, at the last moment, tore off the bandage that they had placed over his eyes.

"Shoot!" he cried. "May Serbia live!"

This incident has been immortalized in verse by a well-known Serbian poet, and I have good reason to remember the poem, for I laboured to make a translation of it for Captain Popovitch, another of our officer friends—no relation to the general at Skoplje. Popovitch is one of the commonest of Serbian names.

The captain was a most genial soul, and the

friend of every one. He was known familiarly to us all as "Poppy," and had no objection whatever to the nickname. He knew a little English, and was anxious to learn more. His idea with the poem was that he would recite it, in English, at one of the entertainments in which we occasionally indulged. But it proved too much for him—or, perhaps, the adaptation into English verse was too much for me.

There was a solemn commemoration service held at Mladenovatz on the anniversary of the battle of Zer. The Second Army was marshalled in force and assembled round three sides of the church—an edifice of Byzantine style but aggressively modern—and the ceremony, with its display of the war-stained colours, was quite imposing. The day was memorable to myself and to others of the masculine hospital staff, since it marked our first public appearance in Serbian uniform. The military tailors at Nish had been rather long over their work, which, however, when completed, was very satisfactory. The cloth used in Serbia at this time was all bought in England and was particularly fine. Most of us had received our swords as gifts from officer friends—mine was presented to me by Captain Gwozditch; Dr. Beavis received his from "Poppy."

The most conspicuous figure—probably very much against his will—at this ceremony was the general in command of the Second Army, Voyvoda Stepanovitch. He was an old man who had, however, covered himself with glory

before Adrianople in the Turkish War, and subsequently at this same battle of Zer. The title of "Voyvoda" was bestowed upon him after the latter event. This title corresponds to the English "Duke"; it has only been used in a military sense in the Serbian army for the last three or four years. One speaks also of Voyvoda Putnik, who was "Chef d'Etat-Major du Grand Quartier Général," and of Voyvoda Michitch, Commander of the First Army. The former was the actual head of the whole army, under the Crown Prince Alexander, who ranked as Commander-in-Chief. The Crown Prince was immensely popular, not only with the soldiers, but with the whole country.

Apart from the Prince, it is, perhaps, a pity that the higher command was entrusted to such old men. Voyvoda Putnik, highly distinguished as he was, was in bad health. It was pitiful to see him during the retreat; he was too weak to walk or ride, and had to be carried in a litter the best part of the way. During the latter part of the war he was generally replaced by his Aid-general Givko Pavlovitch, and at one time there was serious talk of making Voyvoda Stepanovitch the "Chef d'Etat-Major" in his place. The latter was old too, but wonderfully strong and active.

An uncommon type of man was Voyvoda Stepanovitch. Of peasant origin, he had attained his high position through sheer merit. He was, however, very reserved, and had kept himself very much to himself; except on official occasions



CEREMONY TO COMMEMORATE ANNIVERSARY OF BATTLE OF ZER

he hardly ever held converse with any one. He used to wander about alone at Mladenovatz, noticing nobody and appearing lost in thought. On these occasions he wore a little round cap—like a boy's football cap—which gave him the quaintest appearance. People said that he was working out great strategic plans in his mind—for strategy was his forte—and of course this may have been so.

That he felt the retreat acutely there is no doubt. It was very sad to observe him at the different places where a halt was made. He would sit all day long, invariably alone, just outside the door of the Staff quarters wherever they might be, or walk up and down, up and down, with tireless monotony, over a small given piece of ground—never passing his own self-appointed boundaries at either end. And it was pitiful to realize that this lonely man was never really alone, for the ghosts of shattered ambition and humiliated pride were ever present at his heels, while over his head hovered those grim spectres of famine and disease and defeat which were overwhelming his beloved army—of which he stood representative—while he was powerless to conjure them away.

I heard that when all was feared to be lost there were a few terrible moments in which he spoke of suicide and adjured his officers to consider the advisability of taking their own lives. Rather such a death than that they, the upholders of Serbia's pride, should fall into the

hands of the enemy. Luckily such a fate did not befall them, and Voyvoda Stepanovitch's strategy was admirably vindicated by the manner in which the retreat of the Second Army, in the face of difficulties that must have appeared insurmountable, was carried out. I have heard that nearly fifty cannon were brought through safely to Scutari—and this may be placed to the credit of our Voyvoda.

Our attention was particularly called during the ceremony at the church to the 11th Regiment of the Second Army, for this regiment had greatly distinguished itself against the Austrian invader. It was destined, too, to bear much of the brunt of the fighting later on. Its men, I am told, are recruited from the Shoumadija, which is the district round Kraguejevatz in the centre of the country, the natives of which are of the purest Serbian blood.

We never visited the battlefield of Zer—it was too far away—but we often used to wander on the hill of Kosmaj, which was within reasonable distance. It was here that the flood of Austrian invasion was first stemmed, and it was intensely interesting to trace out, as one could, the course of the battle.

And here I should like to enter a protest against a custom which, if I may judge from what I have myself seen, is, I fear, all too common upon such fields of battle. I refer to the carrying away of " trophies " in the shape of dead men's bones. Anything else, by all means

—the ground of Kosmaj was plentifully littered with all manner of records of the fight—but let the dead rest in their quiet graves. I use the word "graves" advisedly, for even these were not spared by indefatigable souvenir hunters. Alice was once called to order for using the word "ghoulish" in connection with this pursuit; nevertheless one feels that the term was utterly justified.

Mladenovatz itself is a little town of no interest. It contains a street of one-storied houses and a market-place. A large number of the shops appear to be apportioned to the sale of shoes, the broad sabots affected by the peasants, which look as if they consisted mainly of leather straps. I bought a pair to wear as slippers, and found them quite comfortable.

The peasant's shoe is regarded as a symbol throughout Serbia. Many people were wearing tiny models in filigree silver as charms in those days. Each model, called an "opanak," bears an inscription: "If you did not know me before, you know me now." It is an old Serbian saying, and in this connection is used to testify to the gratitude which the nation feels to its peasant population that responded so readily to the call to arms. The shoe that for generations had trodden the earth in labour is the shoe that has saved Serbia. I am writing, of course, of a period before the disaster that befell the land; but who can say that the Serbian shoe may not still vindicate itself?

"If you did not know me before, you know me now." It will be good when the day comes for that motto to be impressed upon the invader.

To my mind the conditions of life in Serbia, if it had not been for the constant warfare of the past few years, approach the ideal. I am referring to the peasant population, which is, or was, the essential element to be considered, and my remarks do not apply to Macedonia or to the New Provinces, but only to that part now known as Old Serbia, which has been built up since the emancipation from Turkey during the last hundred years.

There is no wealth—but, on the other hand, there is no poverty. Every man has something of his own. Tramps and beggars are unknown on the Serbian roads. I have often heard people say: "What a lazy race the Serbs must be—look at the development of which their land is capable!" And, of course, it is quite true; but when modern development sets in, as it is bound to sooner or later, then will come also wealth and poverty, and the simple life that prevails to-day will be at an end. Rumania, and, in a lesser degree, Bulgaria, have known the change; you will not find, or so I am told, the same content among their peasantry as you will in Serbia. The wealthy landlord has lifted his head in these countries, and the small farmer, happy in his independence, tends to disappear.

In Serbia the "Zadruga" system still prevails, although the push of modern progress is thrusting

it aside. A "Zadruga" means a "company," but it is not the sort of company that we usually understand by the term—it means the community of interest of a single family. When a man marries he continues to reside in his parents' house; if this is not large enough another one is built for him and his wife. In the course of years quite a large company is gathered together, twenty or thirty families or more, all sharing alike and all under the general control of the "gospodar," who is either elected by the community or who is the oldest member of it. This system has many palpable advantages; the disadvantage, if it is a disadvantage to a country like Serbia, is that it discourages any spirit of enterprise on the part of the individual.

But it will be a pity when the present simplicity of rural life is lost. Many a time we were hospitably received and entertained in cottage homes; Serbian tradition demands that any stranger shall be received as a guest in any house where he may ask for shelter; he must be fed and lodged, if he wishes it, for three days, after which, if he still desires to remain, the obligation is upon him to pay his way. Modern progress will soon do away with this amiable propensity.

Tradition has always meant, and still means, much to the Serb. It would fill a volume to write of the strange customs that still prevail. Some were brought to our intimate knowledge, others I have had described to me. They are as

ancient as those wonderful epic poems which have been handed down from time immemorial, and which are repeated to-day, as they were hundreds of years ago, to the monotonous strain of the "gousle," the queer one-stringed instrument in which the peasants delight.

In Macedonia you get the bagpipes instead of the "gousle." The sound under such unusual conditions falls strangely upon British ears, while it is even more strange to British eyes to see the bagpipes manipulated, as they usually are, by some fantastically dressed gipsy.

It was very pleasant to wander through the fields and along the shady roads—not the main ones, for they as a rule are far from shady—as evening was drawing in. The scenery here is utterly different to that of the south; it possesses no grandeur, nor is there the faintest suggestion of wildness about it; it is prettily undulating, not unlike bits of Surrey, if it were not for the maize-fields which are its most prominent feature. The maize grows tall; a field of it seen from a little distance and against a dark background always made me think queerly of a regiment of fairy soldiers, clad in green uniform and drawn up in battle array.

One met such wonderful cavalcades upon those roads towards dusk. You would think from the variety of the collection that all the farmyard denizens were driven out in the morning and brought home at night. One soon gets accustomed to the oxen; a woman may be afraid of

cows in England, but she could have no fear of these gentle creatures—although some of them are armed with very strong horns. Generations of toil have tamed them to a wonderful placidity; you can read it in their soft and beautiful eyes. You rarely see buffaloes here as in the south, nor the savage-looking pigs that have fur like sheep; one feels somehow that they would be out of place.

The peasant girls, gay in their many-coloured aprons, chatter as they follow the cattle home; the men may go singing, and now and again they will shout to some other party across the valley, and the reply will come like an echo from the distance; the old women are there too, spinning dexterously as they walk; merry children trot along by their parents' side. The whole family has been out in the fields. It all seems wonderfully peaceful, the land very happy.

Yet only a week or so later terrified refugees were pouring down those quiet roads, and the peaceful homestead was housing the hated invader.

CHAPTER V

BELGRADE

We never made any official stay at Belgrade, but the Serbian capital being only some forty miles from Mladenovatz—with direct communication by train—we were able to pay it one or two visits.

There was one point of considerable inconvenience about the journey. Owing to the not infrequent bombarding of the Belgrade railway station, no trains ran as far as the city; everybody had to descend at a small station about eight miles off, and drive the rest of the way. The carriages obtainable were of a most ramshackle order, the road was usually ankle deep in mud, and since the drivers could practically charge what they liked, the excursion became an expensive one.

When we paid our first visit there was a certain amount of excitement in the town. An Austrian aeroplane had come over and dropped some bombs, killing a few civilians; it was supposed to be an act of retaliation for a previous Serbian attack upon a bridge in Austrian territory. As a matter of fact the Austrians were always rather chary of doing material damage to Belgrade—

so much of their money is invested in industrial concerns in that city.

They showed little respect, however, for private property during their first—and luckily brief—occupation of the town as conquerors. We had ample evidence of this in a visit that we paid, in the company of the owner, to the villa of our friend, Captain Gwozditch. The visit had some element of the dramatic about it, for it was the first time, since the enemy occupation, that Captain Gwozditch had been to his house, and he had no idea in what condition he would find it.

In many respects it had been treated very badly. There had been abundant looting; every bit of silver had been taken, and valuable Persian rugs, used, as is a favourite custom in Serbia, to decorate the walls, had been stripped down and carried away; but this was understandable, if distinctly unpleasant; what annoyed our friend most was the wanton damage that had been committed.

The furniture had been hacked about from a sheer spirit of malice; the fine brocade coverings of the chairs had been slit with the sword. The villa possessed a pretty garden, but it was pretty no longer; the rose-trees had been cut down, and the shrubs, some of them rare varieties, torn up by the roots.

It was a sad day for our friend—and I fear that his Belgrade property has fared still worse since the second and present enemy occupation, though

as yet he has not been able to obtain definite information about it. Besides the villa, which is in the suburbs, he owns a large house, then let to the Greek Legation, in the centre of the town, and as we know that the bombardment was particularly severe at this spot, the chances are that the house has been destroyed.

Talking of the wanton damage perpetrated by the Austrians, I am reminded of what happened to a Belgrade shoemaker. They got hold of his stock and carried away or destroyed the half of it, and it was so done that he was not left with a single intact pair of boots or shoes.

Belgrade is the only city of Serbia that resembles our conception of what a town should be. Under ordinary circumstances it has plenty of good shops, and its main street, which is of great length, is really handsome. Moreover it is wood-paved, which is a great relief after the mud and the cobble-stones to which one has to accustom oneself elsewhere. I can imagine Belgrade as quite a gay town normally, very Austrian in type, as is only natural from its position; but, of course, as we saw it it was more or less a town of the dead. The greater proportion of its inhabitants had deserted it; there were no theatres or places of entertainment of any kind open; hotels and cafés—except one or two of secondary merit—were closed; the tramway had ceased to run; shutters were up in front of most of the shops. With the enemy so close at hand, it was only what was to be expected.

Some of the houses have been very badly knocked about—the handsome buildings near the Fort have suffered most, and the whole street that follows the course of the river is more or less in ruins. Intermittent bombardment was in the order of things all the time, so that street was hardly one that one would select for a pleasant stroll.

The trenches along the Danube were well organized. It was curious to visit them, and to see the Austrians moving about on the other side of the river, as one occasionally could. Of course it was not wise to show oneself, since there was such a thing as sniping; but at that time I don't think it was much indulged in.

In the main street, divided by a modest little garden, are the new palaces of the King and the Crown Prince. They are quite unpretentious. The old "Konak" was destroyed after the assassination of King Alexander in 1903. As to this ghastly tragedy, which still rankles in the minds of many people at home, alienating the sympathy for Serbia that they might otherwise feel, it must be remembered that it was organized by a small group of officers, the chief of whom was a near relative of the unfortunate Queen Draga, and that the majority of those concerned in the attack upon the palace that fatal night of June believed that it was no more than a *coup d'état*, enforcing the abdication of the King, that was to be carried out. They were met by armed opposition, however, and lost their heads. Once

blood was shed, the rest followed almost automatically.

It is unjust—leaving altogether aside the question of motive—to condemn a whole army, a whole nation, for the action of a few individuals. Serbia, recognizing the danger into which she had been drifting through the politics of Alexander—the *rapprochement* with Austria—accepted the *fait accompli* with resignation, not approving the act, but thankful for its consequences. And no one can say that King Peter, grandson of the famous Black George, has not justified his name. His great ancestor was the first to liberate Serbian soil from the Turkish oppressor; King Peter on the battlefield of Koumanovo completed the work of freeing his country.

Do we in England remember what Serbia accomplished in that short, sharp campaign which culminated in the great victory of Koumanovo? How many of those who still condemn the whole race for the criminal action of a handful of drunken officers could even recall the name of Koumanovo if it were mentioned to them? Yet there, if she had not already done so, Serbia retrieved her honour.

In six weeks the Serbs, assisted by the Montenegrins, conquered territory almost double the size of the existing kingdom. The war was waged under difficult conditions, in winter, and against a picked army. This was in 1912. The Turkish forces had been designed to march through Serbia and attack the Bulgarian army in the rear.

The battle of Koumanovo put an end to any such aspirations. It permitted the Bulgars, freed from this all-important opposition, to continue their victorious advance; it was the crucial point of the first Balkan War.

And how was it repaid by Bulgaria? She claimed as her right the very territory which Serbia had conquered by such prodigies of valour. It is the same land which the Allies to-day, regardless of Serbia's pride, were ready to hand over to the grasping and implacable enemy as an exchange for a doubtful neutrality. And when, yielding to pressure, Serbia gave her consent, what was, in effect, the reply of Bulgaria?

"We do not care to negotiate for territory which we can take for ourselves if we so desire."

And even then, when she might, Serbia was not allowed to strike! Often I have wondered if she had not regretted her refusal of the separate and profitable peace which she might have made long before with Austria, a peace that would have saved her from all that she has since undergone. But that was not Serbia's idea of honour; she was faithful to her Allies. And if there were any such regrets I have never, in any quarter whatever, heard them expressed in words.

I wonder if people in England who have been so careful of Bulgaria's susceptibilities know anything of the treacherous attack of July 1913, which precipitated the second Balkan War. Do they know of the banquet, called to celebrate

peaceful negotiations, at which Serbs and Bulgars toasted one another, the banquet from which Serbian officers rose only to be murdered by their late table companions ?

I have met the widow of an officer who died on that occasion ; I have heard the story from the lips of those who know. Is it to be wondered at that the second Balkan War was remarkable for its intense fierceness ? Can one be surprised that the hatred of Serbia has never died ?

There is no doubt whatever as to the affection with which the country regards King Peter. Go where you will, in public building or private house, in hotel or café, in the humblest cottage, you will almost certainly find his portrait decorating the wall. And, indeed, he has shown himself to be a worthy father of his people.

A friend of ours in Belgrade, a man whose name is a household word, gave us some description of the scene that prevailed upon the re-entry of the Serbs into their own city, driving the Austrians before them, and headed by their King.

The sound of heavy firing mingled with the tremendous roar of welcome that the populace awarded him. Men wept for joy, and were not ashamed of their tears ; women threw bunches of flowers ; children clapped their little hands ; the whole city was beside itself with joy.

But it was King Peter who remembered to give thanks to God for victory.

He paused in his triumphant progress through



KING PETER ON THE BATTLEFIELD

the streets of the capital; alone—unattended—he entered one of the largest churches and sinking humbly upon his knees, he gave God praise.

His prayer concluded, he emerged and once more took his place at the head of the procession. He rode, he, the old, half-crippled King who had risen from a sick-bed to be in the trenches with the common soldiers, he rode at the head of his troops, a tall son on either side, their three swords uplifted, the sun glittering on their naked blades; and all the while the roar of the cannon could be heard in the distance, and fighting was still going on in some of the streets.

They came to the "Konak," over which the Austrian flag was still flying. And then one of Belgrade's best-known citizens rushed into the building and with his own hands hauled down the hated flag. He carried it to the entrance of the palace and spread it on the ground as a carpet for the king to walk on. Thus did King Peter tread the Austrian flag under his feet as he came into his own again.

The King does not spend much of his time at Belgrade; he prefers his quiet country home at Tapola, which is not very far from Mladenovatz. The house is of the most simple description, but it stands in the shadow of a noble monument which has recently been erected—it was not quite completed when we were there—to the memory of the family of Kara-George. It is largely constructed of marble, most of which has been

derived from local quarries, the rest imported from Italy. The great Kara-George was born at Tapola in 1766, had his house there like the present king, and was buried in the plain little Byzantine church.

Our friend who told us the stories about the King also had a good deal to say on another subject of the first interest in connection with the world war. He had very firm convictions about the murders of Serajevo.

"There are plenty of people," he said, "who still maintain that Serbia was directly responsible for the outbreak of hostilities, and so for all the terrible bloodshed that has ensued. They speak very lightly and without knowledge of many facts that might well induce them to moderate their views. They have readily accepted the Austrian contention—that the murders were due to political intrigue on the part of the Young Serb party. They infer that the Serbian authorities were connected with the plot."

These were remarks that I was able to endorse from my own experience. I had heard precisely similar views expressed in England when we first contemplated our visit to Serbia. "A nation of cut-throats," some one said; "remember how they murdered their own king. Now they've been at it again, and we are plunged in war in consequence."

"The murderers," my friend continued, "were Serbs of Bosnia, Austrian subjects. The father of one of them was in the service of the Austrian

police. He himself was regarded in Belgrade as an Austrian spy—so much so that an order for his expulsion was issued. His companions, like himself, were well known to the police as bad characters, and no proof whatever was forthcoming as to their connection with any responsible political parties in Serbia; the contrary is rather the fact.

"Now it is well known that the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his duchess were anything but popular figures at the Austrian court. Rumours had been afloat for some time as to the unsatisfactory state of the Archduke's health, and he had succeeded in making many powerful enemies who did not agree with his political views and who had every reason to fear his accession to the throne—imminent, having regard to the age and weakness of the Emperor. He was regarded as being especially hostile to the Magyars.

"His wife, even more than himself, was regarded with disfavour. She was his morganatic spouse, a poor maid-of-honour, and in marrying her he had taken an obligation that she should never be Empress and that their children should never inherit the throne. The position from every point of view was intensely undesirable.

"Now," continued our friend, "does it not seem more likely that if there was an intrigue against the royal couple it should have its origin in Austria-Hungary rather than in Serbia? What had Serbia to gain by such a murder?

She could not desire to bring upon herself the inevitable vengeance of her powerful neighbour; she was not in a state to make war—hardly yet recovered from her two costly campaigns. But, on the other hand, there were certain people in Austria who had everything to gain, and who, clever politicians, may have intentionally chosen for their agents men of Serbian birth in order to precipitate a crisis, in order to give an excuse for further demands upon a country that Austria was determined to crush."

Our friend spoke at considerable length upon this subject; it was one to which he had evidently given much attention. He concluded that Austria had made a diplomatic blunder, that she had not imagined Russia would risk war for the sake of Serbia; he recalled to our memory how at the last moment she had expressed herself ready to negotiate, but it was too late—Germany had been summoned to take a hand in the game, and Germany realized that her great opportunity had come. Austria was carelessly thrust aside and her proposal to the Entente rendered ineffective by the Kaiser's brusque declaration of war against Russia. The mean and petty aims of Austria were ruthlessly swallowed up in the tremendous and long-meditated ambitions of the German war lord.

I must not forget to mention one final piece of information of some interest, given in connection with the Serajevo murders—committed, by the way, on the anniversary of the battle of Kossovo.

The Austrian general who had command of the city at that time, and to whose criminal negligence the perpetration of the murders was mainly due, was the same man who was afterwards placed in command of the "punitive expedition" against Serbia. It was for his utter and disgraceful failure over this—not for his disregard of duty at Serajevo—that General Potiorek was degraded and punished.

We were far away from Belgrade when the fresh Austro-German attack was made upon it, but having so many friends there we were, of course, keenly interested and excited as to its fate. But very little news filtered through to Pirot, where we were stationed, and it was not till much later that I was able to collect any information that I could regard as reliable.

According to my notes Belgrade fell on October 7th; we were at the time still awaiting developments on the Bulgarian frontier. I can recollect very well how concerned we were for the welfare of our friends belonging to the various hospitals, and it was by no means consoling when we received news of a piece of German "frightfulness" which I believe to be true. It was said that the enemy turned one of their heavy batteries on the main road, swarming as it was with harmless, helpless citizens, women and children predominating, and that aircraft, flying low, directed the fire. This futile, wanton slaughter was only what was to be expected of the Germans, but it made us shudder, nevertheless, for we

realized how close had drawn the shadow of war.

We heard, too, how the refugees had come pouring into Mladenovatz in the middle of a pitch-dark and cold night, in pouring rain, and along a road that had become a sea of mud. Among them were many ladies of the first families of Belgrade who had escaped, scantily clad—some of them with scarcely enough to cover them. And Mladenovatz could provide no shelter; it was already crowded to overflowing; so the majority of the refugees, rich and poor alike, had to huddle together and find what rest they could in the open street.

The flight from Belgrade was accompanied by all the elements of panic—inevitably so. As far as I know, that condition was not repeated, certainly not on a scale of any magnitude, in the retreat from any other city. Many a time we took our departure in a desperate hurry, but everything was accomplished in an orderly fashion. We were not subjected to the enemy fire. I believe the retreat from Krushervatz was somewhat precipitate, but not like that from Belgrade.

I must add a few lines as to England's share in the defence of Belgrade. Some months earlier we had smuggled a naval contingent into the country under the control of Admiral Troubridge and Commander Ker. They had eight guns, divided into four batteries. They also had a patrol boat which carried a machine-gun. The

batteries were placed under the command of Serbian officers, and the British Marines were helped in their work by Serbian soldiers.

There were also French and Russian contingents at Belgrade. I am told that the British guns were the last to be silenced. Commander Ker got away with the loss of only two, which were destroyed before they were abandoned. We saw a good deal of him during the retreat. He had a tremendous job to get his men and guns through, and it was all to no effect, for the two last batteries had to be destroyed at Prishtina.

The French had an aviation detachment at Belgrade all through the summer, which rendered very good service; but it was removed—I cannot say why—shortly before the attack.

Of course the loss that mattered most, perhaps the deciding factor, was the withdrawal of Serbian troops and batteries from the Danube to the Bulgarian frontier. It was all a carefully prepared scheme; the Bulgarian "peaceful concentration" had no other object but to weaken the Belgrade defences in order to allow of the Austro-German advance. Meanwhile the Bulgars were in no hurry to attack, in order that before they did so proceedings might be reversed —that the rapid Austro-German advance might demand a weakening of the Serbian defences on their own border.

It was a pretty game, and one can imagine the hilarious joy of Sofia diplomacy when it was found to be a workable proposition. All they

had to do was to keep "negotiating," and so ward off a Serbian attack, which might have been very unpleasant for them, until they were quite ready. Then they would deliver the attack themselves.

Really the Allies were the most considerate people under the sun.

CHAPTER VI

PIROT

On September 28th, 1915, we left Mladenovatz, and it is from that date that we may reckon the beginning of the long and eventful journeying—nearly three months—that carried us across Serbia and Montenegro and has eventually landed us here at Scutari in Albania. Where and when the end will be I cannot yet say.

We were bound for Pirot, a little town on the Bulgarian frontier, where our army was concentrating against an attack, which was regarded as imminent. We and our friends upon the Staff, in those days, viewed the Bulgarian menace with a certain equanimity, for we had not as yet had time to see things as they were. True, there was a tremendous frontier to be held, and the withdrawal of the Second Army meant a serious weakening of the Danube defences, but Serbia placed infinite confidence in her great Allies; with their assistance, Bulgaria would receive the punishment she merited if she was really foolish enough to attack.

The journey from Mladenovatz took us three days—under ordinary circumstances it could be accomplished in eighteen hours or less—but we

did not mind being held up for indefinite periods at this little station or that, for, naturally, troop trains must take priority, and it was always a pleasure, not unmixed with excitement, to watch the thronging crowds upon the platforms, and now and then to join in the cheering that went up for the brave lads as they swarmed into the cars that awaited them, filling them to overflowing, and quite regardless of the formal " forty men or six horses " with which words each truck was inscribed.

" Jiveo ! Jiveo ! " The cry was already very familiar to us as a toast at banquets, as an expression of approval in public halls, as a greeting to some popular personality, but it took on a wholly new significance now. For it had in it all a nation's care for its stalwart sons, the father's pride, the mother's tears, the sweetheart's desire, the child's faith ; and one's voice grew husky, one's eyes a little dim in sympathy. And yet, of course, one smiled, for every one was smiling ; and as for the young soldiers themselves, they were garlanded with flowers as if they were going to some fête, and not to risk their lives amid the horrors of the battlefield.

But if one could have lifted the veil that hung over the next few weeks, if one could have foreseen only a little of what was to come !

In this connection we had rather a curious experience. At one of the wayside stations we recognized a familiar face. It was that of a

soldier who had been a patient at one of the Skoplje hospitals; he had been wounded in the previous fighting with the Austrians—not a serious wound in itself, but dangerous blood-poisoning had supervened. An intelligent, well-educated man, he had taken part in all of Serbia's recent wars, and his hatred of the Bulgars was unqualified.

"We did not pay them out sufficiently," he often used to remark. "Some day our chance will come again."

Well, now it had come, and that was the observation with which we greeted him. But he showed little of the old sanguine spirit; his demeanour was in strong contrast to that of the cheering crowds that surrounded him.

He stretched out an arm and showed us that it was thin and gaunt.

"It's too soon — too soon," he muttered. "There are so many of us like myself who have not been long enough out of hospital to put up a good fight. People don't get over typhus in a hurry, and there are hundreds and hundreds of men back in the ranks who were down with it in the spring, and who ought hardly to be out of their beds."

He shrugged his shoulders with a sort of passive resignation and smiled—but I had reason to know that he spoke the truth.

"However, if one was at death's door one would want to get up to fight the Bulgars," he remarked.

At parting we said that we hoped we should meet again. He re-echoed the sentiment, and added:

"I wonder where it will be!"

He may have meant nothing by those words, but they sounded, and were, strangely ominous.

For we did meet him again. It was while we were at Prokuplje, and when the Serbian army was in full retreat. We did not get a chance of addressing him, for he was marching with a detachment of his regiment, but our eyes met and there was a look in his which conveyed much. He gave a slight shrug to his shoulders too. He had always been a lean man, but now his face was badly drawn and he looked ill.

That meeting depressed us for the rest of the day.

We had left Mladenovatz in advance of the hospital in order to be with the army, and at the same time to see what arrangements had been made for the accommodation of the unit. We found that a large and handsome building had been set apart for them. As at Skoplje it was properly the gymnasium, and for the first few days we found it difficult to keep the place clear of the scholars, who seemed to think that they had the right to come in and wander about as they pleased.

When the unit arrived it was decided that the whole building, with the exception of a common-room for the staff, should be given up for hospital purposes. There was a convenient piece of open

ground close by, where tents could be pitched for sleeping quarters. As for Alice and myself, we were already comfortably settled in the town.

We had had some difficulty about our lodging, however. It was not that Pirot was overcrowded; it was that so many people had already taken to flight and carried away with them all their furniture and belongings. Empty rooms we might have had in plenty—but it never struck us in those days that the time would come when an empty room might be considered a luxury.

We were comfortably housed at last in a really nicely furnished room, and we were treated with the greatest civility by the proprietress, who was an elderly lady. We had our breakfast in the morning—other meals were taken at the hospital when that got installed, or at the hotel—and the good lady kept producing coffee, cakes, and other luxuries for our edification.

There is a curious habit in Serbia, no doubt of Turkish origin, of handing round a plateful of jam, called "slatko," before the coffee is served. It has its place on a tray which always holds as many tumblers of water as there are guests, and also as many spoons. You help yourself to a spoonful of jam and then replace the spoon in a receptacle for that purpose; then you take a sip of water from one of the tumblers and return that also to the tray; that is the etiquette of the function, and it is very bad manners to refuse.

We were considerably worried when we learned that we could only occupy our quarters for a couple of nights; our landlady was following the general example of the townsfolk and taking to flight with all her belongings, which included a blind old dog, a kitten, and two ducks. This reminded me of our Serbian cook at Mladenovatz, who possessed two tame geese which she insisted on taking with her when the camp was broken up.

As we protested at being turned out, our hostess consented, though with considerable trepidation, for she was terribly afraid of the Bulgarians, to stay another day.

Of course we should not have been so insistent had we known that the kind old lady did not mean to take a penny in payment for her hospitality. "You have come to our country to help us," she declared, "and it is very little that we can do in return."

This was very far from being the only example of such hospitality that we met with in Serbia. I have already mentioned the consideration with which we were treated in various villages. Later on we were to find out, to our cost, how different to the Serb in this respect is the Montenegrin peasant.

We found new quarters, again after some difficulty. It was a nice room too, well carpeted and curtained, and the walls adorned, according to the almost universal custom, with strips of native carpet work, mats and Berlin wool work. Besides these, one invariably finds a large selec-

tion of photographs, family groups, framed or unframed, and picture post cards adorning the wall; our new apartment had, in addition, two particularly hideous oleographs in large gold frames which were the pride of our landlady, for she called our attention to them at once.

Like our recent hostess, she, too, was horribly afraid of the Bulgarians; she was divided between her fear and her love of home, uncertain what she ought to do.

We had expected to find hostilities commenced when we reached Pirot, for the Serbs, knowing their treacherous enemy, were burning with desire to be up and doing. But they were not allowed to move—not even when the respective ambassadors had been withdrawn. Bulgaria was simply allowed to await her own convenience to attack. How the Serbs were kept in check, waiting there at such close quarters, heaven alone knows. I have heard it affirmed, and believe it quite possible, that had Serbia been allowed to take the offensive at her own time she could have swept down upon Sofia with the greatest ease—for she was prepared and Bulgaria was not. Then she would have had her army free for Mackensen's attack—if, under such circumstances, it had ever been made.

A few words here as to the construction of the Serbian army at this time may not be out of place.

In the course of the war, up to this period, Serbia had certainly lost from 70,000 to 80,000

men—this, of course, including the devastation of the typhus epidemic. By dint of great energy during the peaceful summer months she had brought up her fighting strength to some 200,000. This was a nominal total, and, as I have tried to express, many of the troops were but barely recovered from illness or wounds—not really fit for a fresh campaign. Also the "last reserves" were called out, old men and boys.

Reliance was placed mainly on the infantry. Whenever they came to grips the Serbian infantry showed itself immeasurably superior to its opponents. But the German heavy artillery swept everything before it. I have heard of 25,000 projectiles thrown against Belgrade in a day.

The Bulgarian army consisted of 300,000 men; the Austro-Germans, under Mackensen, of a like number. The Serbs, therefore, had a total of 600,000 against them—three to one. Given these circumstances, the only possible tactics were to retreat as slowly as possible, while awaiting the promised assistance from the Allies.

I have heard that an even longer stand might have been made at Belgrade or in its environs had it not been for a German threat to massacre women and children indiscriminately if the town were not wholly yielded up to them.

Roughly, at the outbreak of the fresh hostilities, the Serbian army consisted of eight divisions, each of which embraced four regiments. Five of these—the Divisions of Morava, Drina, Donau, Schumadia, and Timok—belonged to Old Serbia;



THE "ÉTAT-MAJOR" OF THE HEROIC MORAVA DIVISION

the rest—the Divisions of Vardar, Bregalniza and Kossovo—were recruited from the New Territory. From among the latter was formed a cavalry division. This, together with the First Morava and First Timok, constituted the Second Army as we knew it at Pirot. Of these two, it was the Morava Division that distinguished itself most signally in the war. The Timok Division was less lucky—perhaps they had the bad fortune to be placed in positions that became practically untenable.

This was the case in the fighting round Pirot. The weak spot here was the gorge of Kniejevats, north of Pirot, which could not be adequately held owing to the enormous length of frontier that had to be defended. Kniejevats penetrated, and the neighbouring fortress of Zaietchar in Bulgarian hands, the enemy could then descend upon Bella Palanka, cut the line to Nish and encircle Pirot. This is what eventually occurred. Thus Pirot became in its turn untenable.

Before this happened, however, there was some fierce fighting at a place called Drenova Glava. The enemy was allowed to penetrate to a spot named Draganov Vreh, close by. Having set foot there, they believed that the Serbs were demoralized and that the conquest of the more important position would be easy. But they were soon undeceived. They were driven back with great slaughter; hundreds of bodies were left behind, caught in the wire entanglements.

I should like to say a word here as to the

eagerness with which all true Serbs flocked to the colours. I used to meet plenty of those who had hurried back from America for that purpose. Even the women longed to go out and fight.

One of these turned up at Pirot and laid her case before the colonel of a regiment. She had tramped far for the purpose—a tall, fine, peasant girl.

"My two brothers are dead," she explained. "They were both killed at Kosmaj last winter. My father is an old man, too old to fight; but I want to take my dead brothers' place—I want to fight in their stead."

She wept bitterly when the colonel told her that he could not have women fighting in his regiment. He patted her kindly on the shoulder and bade her dry her tears.

"Marry a soldier, my brave girl," he counselled, "and be the mother of soldier sons. That is the way to serve your country, for your sons will be as brave as lions—as brave as their mother."

She was not to be comforted, however, and she walked weeping away; she wanted to strike a blow for Serbia.

This girl was unlucky, for there actually were women who served as soldiers in the Serbian army. At a later period we were able to secure a snapshot of two of them.

We had plenty of time during the enforced period of leisure from our arrival at Pirot to the

commencement of hostilities to explore the town, and as it is a very typical one, a brief account of it will serve at the same time as a description of other towns of Old Serbia that I may have to mention—for they are all on the same pattern, the only palpable difference being in extent. Belgrade, as I have said, is the only city built on the lines to which we in the West are accustomed. In the New Provinces conditions, again, are different; the towns there are more picturesque, but certainly less civilized.

The points that will strike you most in any of these towns of Old Serbia are the length and breadth of the streets and the lowness of the houses. When they were built there was no particular need to economize space, so second and third stories seemed superfluous. Thus you get broad streets of single-storied houses that radiate towards a large open space, the centre of which is usually adorned by a square stone monument which may be a fountain, but more generally appears to serve no particular function at all. If there is only one such space, you will find the market installed there; if there are several, then the market is held in the largest. The market is a most important factor in the life of a Serbian town, and largely does away with the necessity for shops.

As a consequence the shops are of a very unobtrusive order. They do not affect big glass windows, or display much to attract the eye. You will often pass unnoticed the one for which

you are searching. The Serbian shop is typical of the Serb; it is neither rich nor poor, but quite contented with itself.

Paving, both of roadway and sidewalk, is painfully deficient. Before a particularly prosperous shop you may get a small section of pavement—elsewhere, unless the weather happens to be remarkably dry, you get mud. Serbian mud, in town and country, is a thing to wonder at. It must be seen to be believed.

Many a time, and with good reason, have I anathematized that mud, possibly because the car stuck in it, possibly because I had to wade through it at inauspicious times; in only one respect can I quote it as having accomplished a useful purpose—it impeded the advance of the German heavy artillery.

At Pirot they had begun to mend the roads when the war broke out; they had taken up the paving-stones and left them littered about; they had dug deep trenches—and then postponed the work to a more prosperous season. The state of those roads may be imagined, especially as we had heavy rain which went on incessantly for days; one was not tempted to cross the street if one could possibly avoid it.

Pirot is famous for its carpets. There is no large manufactory, but the craft is pursued, on a small scale, in the majority of the houses. In any one of these you may see eight or ten women employed at weaving. The carpets are very distinctive, adorned with quaint geometrical de-

signs, and the colouring is very bright; the secret of this colouring is guarded most scrupulously.

There is also a considerable trade at Pirot in furs, mainly of the commoner order—fox, sheep, goat, etc. The peasants wear sheepskin coats, the woolly side inwards. We were all tempted to spend much money on these furs, and the ladies were particularly attracted by the peasants' coats, which they elected to wear the other way about. Our Serbian friends, however, did not by any means approve of these coats being worn by ladies at all, and so, becoming though they might be, they were generally discarded.

The First British Field Hospital would have been in a somewhat awkward predicament if fighting had really begun as soon as it was expected, for nearly all our surgeons and dressers were, as I have mentioned, at Skoplje, and they found it by no means easy to join up at Pirot. They only just arrived in time, and we remained short-handed in any case, for one or two failed to get through at all. When the day came, however, everything was ready, and the existing staff made up for the absentees by putting in an amount of work that was infinitely to their credit. They did not have long for it, but it was long enough to give ample proof of what they were capable.

It was unfortunate, however, that we were without our commandant. Dr. Beavis had gone to England some weeks earlier in order to collect fresh stores which were badly needed and, more

important still from his point of view, to bring a love romance to a happy conclusion. He was married in England to our matron, Miss Long, and since war will not wait upon love, it happened that by the time he and his bride reached Salonika on their way back again the ruthless Bulgars had cut the line and it was utterly impossible for a junction to be established with the unit.

In the absence of Dr. Beavis, Mr. Gerald Sim assumed command and ably sustained the difficult task that fell upon him during the retreat.

It was on October 13, about five o'clock in the morning, that we awoke to the fact that war had actually broken out. It was the sound of heavy firing coming from across the brow of the low hills, some dozen miles away, that brought us, like most other people, from our beds.

And even had we desired to sleep longer that morning—the sound not being altogether strange to us—we were not permitted to do so. Our good landlady had decided that there was work which she must attend to immediately, and it could not be helped if we were inconvenienced thereby.

It was absolutely necessary, according to her ideas, that our rooms must be dismantled of all that they contained of value: the precious squares of carpet which, together with the photographs and appalling oleographs adorned the walls, must all come down without delay; superfluous chairs and tables must be removed;

curtains were a luxury no longer to be thought of.

She sighed and moaned and panted while she carried out her work. Had she only decided to fly from Pirot like so many of her neighbours, and save all that she could! But she loved her home so dearly, and hated to leave it. And now she had waited too long, and the Bulgarians were upon her, and she would lose all that she possessed.

"I am afraid of the Bulgarians," she kept repeating plaintively—and no doubt, recalling days not so very long past, she had reason for her fear. Certainly we found the same feeling rampant among the civilian population generally —they were afraid of the Bulgarians.

But it was a quaint and interesting manifestation of terror, that dismantling of our rooms in the small hours of the morning. Pitiful, too, in its way, for the poor woman, in her hurry, simply littered the floor with family photographs and treasured picture post cards—we found them lying where they had fallen—she had simply not had the heart to collect them and put them away.

We had to put up with bare floor and walls for the rest of our stay. We were sorry not to have the carpets, but there was some compensation in the removal of the oleographs in their hideous gilt frames. They had been an eyesore to us, though we had every reason to believe that they were the joy of our landlady's heart. They, with

the rest of the property, were eventually stored away in a cellar, but never a day passed without the good woman discussing with us as to whether she had better take to flight at once, or whether it was safe to remain a little longer.

And, of course, for a little while we laughed at her fears. Why should she assume that it was necessary to fly at all? The Serbian army was doing more than holding its own; in one part of the line it was even fighting upon Bulgarian territory. True, the Austro-Germans were establishing themselves in the north, but it was also practically certain that the allied troops—the help definitely promised by England and France—were advancing from Salonika. Was not Nish already hanging out its bunting in honour of their arrival?

But it was hard to convince the good lady, who was wise in her very ignorance. "I am afraid of the Bulgarians," she kept repeating.

Nevertheless she at last appreciated the fact that we, as personal friends of the Staff of the Second Army, must necessarily be in a position to receive early information as to the position; moreover, she had taken a fancy to us, and was unwilling to turn us out of our comfortable lodging. And so day after day, partly for our sakes, but mainly for love of home, she conquered her fears and consented to remain on.

Despite the fall of Belgrade, we were full of confidence. Had we not received the English papers and read the speeches in the English and

French Houses of Parliament? We had translated those speeches for the benefit of our Staff friends, and the fine words were received with loud acclamations and expressions of trust. We shall never recall without a sense of shame our confident enthusiasm and how proudly we boasted our country's honour.

It was not only England and France that made promises. We heard, too, of Russia's fierce denunciation of "Ferdinand of Coburg," in her declaration of war. The brave Serbs would not have long to wait for justice to be given them. During the next few weeks we heard the same thing repeated at intervals, either in letters from the Tsar or from other presumed official source. One of our friends would bring us the news from the "Quartier Général," and at first we used to rejoice over it, recovering our courage; but it was not long before we learnt wisdom—we knew.

However, we had no doubt during those early days at Pirot. We expected daily to hear of the arrival of the Allies at Nish, and that Greece would fulfil her obligation to Serbia, and join in the war. It was no longer a question, as we saw it, of holding up our troops at Salonika; Greece could not now be regarded as a neutral country, since Bulgaria had unscrupulously attacked her ally.

It was a little disconcerting, certainly, to read one day in a Greek paper that the Salonika cafés were crowded with French and British troops

fraternizing with their Greek comrades. It read queerly since we believed those troops to be on their way to Nish.

Meanwhile the staff of the First British Field Hospital had their hands full. The work was very heavy, and the wards were always crowded. Our cars were kept busy running to and fro between the hospital and the various " dressing stations " near the firing-line. On one or two occasions they had narrow escapes, shells falling quite close to them—but that, of course, was in the order of things. A large number of patients were brought in on ox-wagons, and though at first we had been inclined to mock at these conveyances, vaunting our ambulance cars for the transport of the wounded, a closer acquaintance with Serbian roads made one disposed to moderate one's opinion. Slow as was the progress of an ox-wagon, I doubt if the jolting was quite as bad as it was in the cars.

Our cars were Fords and constructed to carry two " stretcher " or six " sitting up " cases. We had a dozen. They were wonderfully serviceable considering the work demanded of them. How we got them safely through some of the tight corners in which we occasionally found ourselves, it would be difficult to say. It is a fact that we negotiated roads—" roads " is merely a term of convenience—where no cars had ever ventured before; it was simply a matter of necessity—having reached a point where it was impossible to turn back, there was nothing for it but to go



DIFFICULTIES OF MOTORING IN SERBIA

on. In some inconceivable way we contrived to get through beds of rivers which were either deep in mud or blocked with great stones and boulders; up paths so precipitous that one felt one was almost defying gravitation; through hedges and over ditches when, as not infrequently happened, the rains had driven some great chasm across the road proper. And the cars always came up smiling at the end of it. Dr. Findlay had a small Morris Oxford, which achieved quite remarkable results in the way of rough travelling. We made many interesting expeditions in that car, and found it most admirably suited to its purpose. I can remember an exciting day when we were pursued by buffaloes. These quiet brutes are not really savage, but they are very curious and persistent. They treated the large cars with respect, but the Morris Oxford, being small, they probably took for some strange sort of animal, and resented its intrusion. Luckily the car responded well to the increase of speed, and we came safely through the threatening herd.

At Pirot, owing to the heavy rains, the roads to the dressing stations were very bad indeed, but our chauffeurs, who were all most capable drivers, soon got to know how to avoid the worst spots, and never got hung up while they were transferring wounded.

The two chargers, Pigeon and Herzig, came in very useful in those days. They were usually at our disposition for riding to the dressing stations,

but Herzig was eventually commandeered for army service only; she was then handed over to her master for use upon the frequent and highly dangerous missions which he had to undertake in fulfilment of his duties as Aide-de-camp to the Staff. Poor Herzig often had a very rough time of it.

These missions of Captain Gwozditch were no light matter. He had to visit the various outlying detachments of the army in order to carry dispatches and make reports. Often he was riding day and night—for the most part well within the firing-line. He always took with him an escort of eight men, two riding in front, two behind, and two on each side. Many a time, owing to the violence of the fire, he was compelled to ride literally stretched out on the back of his horse.

The state in which many of the wounded were brought to the hospital was pitiable. The front was an extended one, on very hilly ground, and the dressing stations—themselves eight or nine miles from the town—could not be brought as near the firing-line as was desirable. Consequently it happened all too often that the unfortunate wounded were left for many hours in their agony, lying out in the pitiless drenching rain, before they were found by the stretcher-bearers, whose duty it was to patrol the lines in search of them. And when found, the transporting was a terrible task, for the steep sides of the hill were so slippery that it was no easy job

even for the ordinary pedestrian to maintain a foothold.

Every man had a cup of hot coffee as soon as he was brought in—also a cigarette if he was not too collapsed to smoke it. It was quite remarkable to see the eagerness with which the cigarettes were accepted; a man had to be very bad indeed to refuse the offer. In this connection Alice witnessed an incident—it was in Belgium—which is probably a record.

A patient had had his jaw shot away, and naturally could not smoke. However, when cigarettes were dealt out he made a motion with his hand, indicating that he would like one too. The nurse gave it to him, wondering, and he promptly thrust it up his nostril and smoked it in that way with every appearance of enjoyment.

If the kind donors of our stock of cigarettes—"Smokes: Soldiers and Sailors"—could have seen the appreciation bestowed upon their gift they could not have failed to be most gratified.

It was always difficult to remove our patients' clothes, so caked were they with mud and blood. I was also astonished at the amount they wore; one could imagine that they had piled all the clothes they possessed upon their backs. We gave every man three blankets upon his bed—which was more than the other local hospitals could do—yet the constant cry was "hladno," which means "cold."

We only kept the really badly wounded in the hospital. Those who were less seriously hurt

were taken in, attended to, and put to bed, but they were dispatched to a base hospital farther on as soon as there was available means for their transport. Often this seemed cruel, and the poor weary men who had thought they had found a haven at last could not understand why they must go; but it was palpably inevitable, one of the hard decrees of war.

The Serbian "sanitary trains" were very well organized. In the Balkan Wars they had distinguished themselves over the Bulgars in this respect; but, naturally, the railways throughout the country only possessing single lines, they could not run very frequently. It is remarkable, indeed, considering those single lines, how well Serbia dealt with the transport question and moved large bodies of troops and heavy material from place to place with seeming facility. Of course it was at the expense of the ordinary passenger traffic, but nobody was disposed to grumble about that.

One could quote many quaint and touching little anecdotes of the hospital patients did space permit. I remember one man with a severe chest wound who was nevertheless tremendously concerned about the contents of his pockets—we always had to be very careful in this respect, so that each man's property was preserved for him. I wondered what the valuables could be, and was not a little concerned when something fell out of one of the pockets and the man made an immediate dive for it. It was

an egg! And there were more in his other pockets.

I recall, too, how a patient was brought into one of the wards on a stretcher without a pillow, and his head rolled a little from side to side. A young soldier in one of the beds—a boy who was to be operated upon later in the afternoon—noticed this and promptly withdrew his own pillow and tossed it with a smile to one of the nurses. It was a graceful act, and very typical of the unselfishness which we have often noticed among the Serbian soldiers.

Another case was too interesting to be overlooked. The sight of our tents, very conspicuous from the hospital window, gave rise to a queer fancy in the mind of one of our patients; he wanted to be moved from the ward and to have his bed made up in a tent, the tiniest for choice. He could not bear the idea of having been placed *hors de combat* so early in the war, and everything in the ward where he lay reminded him of his helpless condition. His great desire was to feel that he was still with his companions at the front, and to lie in a tent would help the illusion. Poor fellow, we could not gratify his whim, for his case was far too serious; the thing eventually became a sort of delirious obsession. It does not do for a soldier in war time to be possessed of too vivid an imagination.

Meanwhile, with the opening of hostilities, the panic in the town and neighbourhood increased. For a while the peasants came to town as usual,

old men and boys, but mostly women, gay in their many-coloured aprons and the bright yellow handkerchiefs which they affect as headgear. They came in their ramshackle wagons drawn by patient oxen, and they settled down in their accustomed places, but trade was not brisk, for instead of buyers they found the market-place full of soldiers, and soon one might see them questioning eagerly or talking together in excited tones, their eyes fixed upon the dark hills, so close at hand, where the opposing armies were facing each other.

The fear was tremendously aggravated when one day an enemy aeroplane appeared, and, instead of bombs, dropped leaflets all over the town appealing to the men of Macedonia to rise, and threatening that Serbia should be ravaged even as Belgium had been. There were Macedonian troops at the time at Pirot, and they were never very trustworthy. I have heard that at Skoplje a whole regiment went over to the enemy.

It was pathetic to watch the peasants flocking in from the adjacent villages, carrying big bundles on their shoulders or articles of furniture of the most varied description—hurrying they knew not where—fear driving them on. The road to the railway station was always crowded with these refugees, poor helpless old men and women and little children.

And it was not long—little more than a week—before the hopes with which we had viewed

the opening of the campaign received a check. At Pirot itself all was well, in spite of the strong divisions of the Second Army which had had to be removed to provide necessary reinforcements elsewhere; but what if Skoplje should fall in the south, thus definitely cutting the Nish–Salonika line? News was very indefinite, but we heard that the enemy was already across the line at Vranya. Then the Austro-Germans were advancing slowly but steadily from the north. With a sigh we heard of the occupation of Mladenovatz —that spot dear to our hearts for many happy weeks spent there in more peaceful days. And as for the Allies, where were they? Apparently still at Salonika, except for a very small force that had reached the frontier and found it impossible to proceed farther until reinforced.

Nish had displayed its bunting in vain: it is a pathetic fact that when the town fell, a few weeks later, there were still to be found houses displaying the flags of the Allies, which had been hoisted in honour of an event which belonged to the realm of hopeful imagination.

Unless help should arrive in another week, retreat—retreat in face of conditions that promised but little success—was inevitable. The fate of the Second Army depended upon its communications through the Nish–Pirot line, and before long those communications would be seriously threatened.

Very fresh and very sad in our memory is the day when our hospital received summary instruc-

tions to prepare for departure that very night. We were up against tragedy as grim as any that may be imagined. Think of it! The wards were crowded with patients, brave men who had given of their blood for their country's sake. Very few were in a fit condition to be moved. To many of them transportation by car and rail could not possibly mean anything but certain death. There were several that had been operated on that very morning—not light operations—there had been a terrible abdominal case and an amputation of the leg at the thigh.

The evacuation was one of the first real terrors of the retreat that we were confronted with. It came to us as a shock, for it did not seem to be a legitimate thing—even in warfare. It was our duty to pick up and tend the wounded, and we were prepared for any sort of horrible scene that might befall in this respect; but here was something utterly different, something that seemed so inexpressibly cruel that one's soul revolted from it.

For every patient had to be removed at a few hours' notice, even those who had been operated upon that very day, even those whose wounds were such that the smallest touch was an agony to them, even those who were hovering between life and death. They had to be carried to motor-cars or ox-wagons and jolted over the rough road to the station, where they were transferred to a "sanitary train" bound for Nish. There were not sufficient blankets to cover them all as

they should have been covered—some went out barefooted—and it was cold that day—very cold. One hated oneself because one had to help at that grim transportation. But let me say at once that the men bore it well, with the stoic pluck that is characteristic of the Serb. None of them, however ill they might be, wished to fall into the hands of the Bulgars.

It is a scene best not dwelt upon. When all the patients had been removed, the staff prepared to follow. And then for us a very material question arose. Should we accompany them, and, with them, make good our escape, or should we, as we might, remain with the Staff of the Second Army and share its fortunes whatever they might be? In the former case we should be safe, and, no doubt, if the retreat continued find our way in due course back home; in the latter we might have to face vicissitudes and dangers, but it would be a wonderful experience and one that does not fall to the lot of many people.

So, unhesitatingly, we decided to stay, and that night we said good-bye to the other members of the "mission," who departed with as much as they could conveniently carry of what remained of the hospital stores. The larger proportion had already been sent, for safety, to Krushervatz, where, alas, later on, transport proving impossible, they must all have fallen into the hands of the Germans. A lot of our personal belongings went with them, including the beautiful gifts we had

received at Skoplje; and this marked the beginning of our various losses. By the time we eventually escaped from the country we possessed no more than what we stood up in. But that is no more than the fate that befell nearly every one.

Our landlady was in a terrible state that night. She could not make up her mind what to do. Afraid of the Bulgarians though she was, she yet could not make up her mind to leave her precious possessions. But we had too much to think about to attend to her troubles.

The great retreat had begun. The army, silent, sullen, not understanding, and anything but resigned, was marching through Pirot, its back to the enemy. What a degradation for a Serb! There were many there who remembered the short but bloody conflict of 1913—they had not retreated before the Bulgars then! And many there were, too, who, flushed with victory, had followed the flying Austrians through the streets of Belgrade, chasing them to the very river banks. That was not a year ago, yet now —were they not as strong, were they not as courageous, had they lost anything of their ardour for battle?

The Serbian soldier could not understand. In those early days of the retreat it happened many a time—pitiful to tell—that soldiers were shot by their officers for refusing to abandon an attack when called upon to do so.

That night the great retreat began. The streets of Pirot presented a spectacle of such



WOUNDED SOLDIERS AT PIROT, WAITING TO BE DRESSED

impressive intensity that though we have seen it repeated again and again—and under conditions far more tragic—this particular picture occupies a foremost place in our minds.

The army, descending from the hills, deserting the position which it had held so bravely, and could have continued to hold had it not been for the menace from the north that threatened to cut it off, was passing through the town. There was perfect order, perfect discipline, very little noise—only the ceaseless tramp, tramp of thousands of feet. Cavalry, too, in endless procession, the horses sometimes a little restive, as if they, too, resented their midnight parade, made their slow progress through rain-drenched dreary streets, under the silent gaze of the few civilians who remained—the same who had acclaimed them so loudly when they passed that way, proudly in the sunshine of confidence, little more than three weeks ago.

And then the long train of pack-horses and transport carts, mostly ox-drawn—all the vast impedimenta of war—the guns, the ammunition wagons, the ambulances, and, alas, the colours, furled and carried like any other equipment, inconspicuously, ingloriously.

Some weeks earlier, at Mladenovatz, during a great review, the soldier who bore the colours had accidentally allowed them to fall, and, for a few moments, trail in the mud. We, who saw it, had caught our breath in horror; it seemed so terrible an omen. We recalled the incident

now. Were we to see the proud Serbian flag trailed through the mud in very earnest?

There were flocks of sheep and goats, too, bullocks unattached, calves and woolly pigs. Often the cattle, emerging from some side street, blocked the way and produced a momentary confusion; then they, too, seemed to fall into line, and the procession was resumed—tramp, tramp.

We slept little if at all that night. The tramp, tramp of tired dejected feet never ceased to ring in our ears—perhaps it never will.

We had hoped to be able to save what remained of the hospital stores, for a good deal had been left behind. There had, however, been thieves in the night, who had helped themselves to a good deal of our personal property as well; and there was no time the following morning to occupy oneself with anything except one's personal safety—unless one wished to fall into the hands of the advancing enemy. The staff got away on horseback or by car; we ourselves found place on the last train that was able to make the journey to Nish.

It was not comfortable by any means. No reserved first-class compartment, such as had been placed at our disposal when we first came to Pirot, but a coal-truck, crowded with refugees almost to the point of suffocation. We were all good-tempered, however, in spite of the cold drenching rain that fell from time to time, and in spite of our hunger—for there were very few among us who had had time to secure any food,

so urgent had been the call for flight. For ourselves, we did not fare so badly—a kind Spanish doctor who was wedged in by our side was the happy possessor of a loaf of bread and a pot of jam, which he generously shared with us and with others.

Just before the train steamed slowly out of Pirot station we caught sight of a scurrying figure, a woman with a big parcel under her arm. It was our landlady, who had evidently succeeded, at the last moment, in tearing herself from her cherished home, and we shrewdly suspected that the parcel she carried must have been those horrible oleographs upon which she set such store.

Such was our first experience of flight, and little we thought when we reached Nish and found it, superficially at least, very much as usual, that the weary exodus would soon have to be taken up again, and that the path we must tread would prove to be the Via Dolorosa, the stony road to Calvary for an entire nation.

CHAPTER VII

NISH

On our arrival at the station of Nish, late in the afternoon, we were surprised to find the whole unit, who had been held up on their way to Krushervatz, and were not likely to get off till night. They had had a very wearisome and overcrowded journey.

This was the last we saw of them—as a collective unit. The cars with the chauffeurs, after many vicissitudes *en route*, reached Nish that night, and proceeded on their way to Krushervatz in the morning. Since they did not know the road, I gave them a very fine map of the country that I possessed—for at that time we believed that we, with the Army Staff, would follow the same way, and that we were therefore bound to meet again. But we did not do so, and I was never able to reclaim my map. It was a loss that I deeply regretted in the light of our subsequent wanderings, for I could not get another anywhere, and the one I had left was a cheap war map, bought in England, that did not mark the roads and was also in other respects inadequate. I had purchased the accurate one at Salonika—it was a German production, and

provided pretty sound evidence of their knowledge of the country. I am quite sure that it would be impossible to find anything like it in England.

The cars, as I learnt later, made no stay at Krushervatz. That town was already threatened by the advancing Germans, and the whole unit had received instructions to proceed to Kralievo. Here they remained, in the hope of being able to collect their stores and make a fresh start at useful work; but it was impossible; transport could not be obtained. Willing and eager to help, they were yet helpless, and could only act in accordance with the instructions of the Serbian authorities, which was to make good their escape while there was time. And so it was with practically all the " missions " in the country.

I may say here that we would willingly have kept the Pirot hospital open after the Bulgarian occupation of the town. One of the surgeons of our staff, Dr. Iott, was an American subject, and he had made all his arrangements to remain. One or two of the nurses had volunteered to keep him company. The Army Medical Staff, however, from whom we took our orders, judged it best that the whole hospital should be cleared, and I must admit that, as far as I can judge, this was also the wish of the patients themselves. It was, indeed, a spirit which we found repeated over and over again—that fear of being left to the mercy of the enemy. The most striking example we had of it was later on at Petch; the wounded men had been moved from Prizren

under conditions so ghastly that one shuddered to see them; moreover, it seemed futile, for beyond Petch were the mountains, and they could hardly be carried any farther.

"Why did you bring them away at all?" I asked the doctor, who was searching high and low through an overcrowded town for some sort of accommodation for the sufferers. "Surely they were better off where they were. There's a hospital at Prizren, and there's none here."

"They wanted to come," he replied laconically.

The unit escaped in the cars from Kralievo when the time came; we heard that they were at Mitrovitza, but we did not cross their track again till we reached Prizren. After this the cars were of no further service to them.

It is easy to be wise after the event; at the same time it is well to profit by experience. The unit, possessing those twelve cars, had always prided itself on its mobility, yet we were wholly dependent upon the Serbian military authorities for the transport of our impedimenta. This worked all right under normal conditions, but with a whole army in retreat everything was reversed. Had we possessed pack-horses, mules, or donkeys of our own, we might have saved much of our stores—besides carrying medical requisites which would have been of intense value. But quite apart from the retreat—upon which nobody reckoned—it seems to me that a field hospital should be able itself to transport every single item of its possessions.

Nish was not overcrowded; as at Pirot, most of the inhabitants had already taken to flight. Those who were lucky had got through to Salonika before the line was cut; of course that was now no longer practicable. We knew by this time that Skoplje had fallen, though reports of its recapture kept coming through. All means of escape in that direction being destroyed, refugees were now thronging to Prishtina and Mitrovitza and to other towns, such as Novi Bazar, in the west, and reports were being received of terrible conditions that were beginning to prevail in those places. This was our first intimation of a likelihood of speedy food shortage.

We had all we wanted at Nish. We were putting up at one of the hotels, and were fairly comfortable—as comfortable as one can expect to be at a Serbian hotel, outside Belgrade, where luxury is never aimed at.

In these hotels the charge is usually made per bed and not per room. This charge is definitely fixed by the town authorities according to the standing of the hotel and the quality of the accommodation offered, and is certainly very moderate; you will usually find in your bedroom a printed list of the hotels of the town with their regulation prices. If the room is a fair-sized one it will contain three or four beds, and there seems to be very little delicacy of feeling as to how these may be apportioned and occupied. Except for the beds there is very little furniture indeed, and the service is a negligible

quantity. It is often fulfilled by a chambermaid who is not selected solely for her capabilities as a servant.

You must not expect to have your boots blacked. That would be interfering with a very profitable street industry which, in the south, is usually in the hands of Turkish boys. Very clever they are at the job too, and you will only have to pay a penny or so, though, as with most other things, the foreign influx has created a disposition to raise the prices. The bootblacks of Salonika are picturesque young vagabonds, and very insistent; they will pursue you in the streets if you look like a possible customer, but you will forgive them because of their dark, merry faces and the attractiveness of their gaily coloured apparel.

Food is usually ordered *à la carte*. There are plenty of dishes which are essentially Serbian, and in these paprika usually forms the chief ingredient. The paprika may be taken whole—stuffed with meat—but more often it is served as a sort of pepper, which, as there are different kinds, varies in strength. The peasants use it as the foundation of nearly all their food. The walls of most native houses are adorned with strings of this vegetable, red and green, drying in the sun—quite a noticeable feature.

For the rest, oil and fat are very plentifully used for cooking purposes, and the failure in the supply of these later on was very badly felt.

Perhaps the nicest of the really Serbian

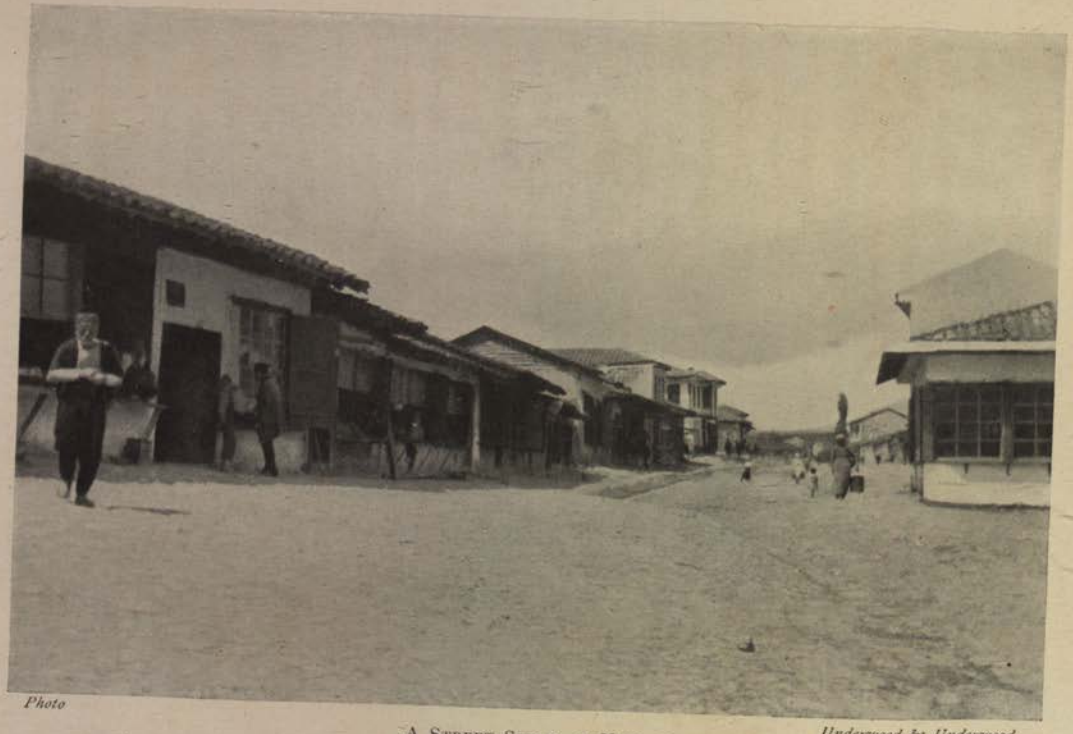


Photo *Underwood & Underwood*

A Street Scene at Nish

specialities is their chicken soup. There is nothing parsimonious about this dish, and it constitutes a meal in itself, for a whole chicken will be used for quite a moderate portion.

I must also not forget to mention the native fondness for sucking-pig, which, however, does not often appear on the hotel menu, as it is reserved for fête days, when it is cooked whole on a primitive spit set up over a wood fire in some convenient spot in the open air.

Eggs, at normal times, are abundant, and a favourite way of eating them is in the shape of the pancake; you can ask for them fried too, but the poached egg was an innovation which came as a surprise when I introduced it in various houses where we happened to stay, and when the question of food had become one of some importance.

Fresh milk was not always so easily obtained, and butter at all times was rare. We soon got into the habit of taking our tea in the way favoured by the country—very hot and weak and sweet, with a slice of lemon in it, when lemon was procurable—and drunk out of a glass. When we tried to make it ourselves it was usually much too strong; to be agreeable it should be of the very faintest amber colour.

It is queer how easily one may adopt the habits of other countries. At home it would never have occurred to me to drink coffee, especially thick and black, at any odd hour of the day, but in the East it seemed quite natural to do so. With the Turk this coffee drinking is almost a

vice, as everybody knows; the surprising point to me was how easily the vice might be acquired. Alice never succumbed to it—a fact for which I was selfishly gratified, since it frequently enabled me to get two cups instead of one.

Wine was usually obtainable—of course I am writing of the comparatively normal times before the retreat—but it was of a poor quality, for though there are plenty of vineyards, and good ones too, the proper cultivation of the grape has been neglected. Can one be surprised when one remembers that for years the country has been in a state of war? You would not find any imported wines or beers; no doubt there used to be plenty of the latter from Germany, but that source of supply existed no longer. The few Serbian breweries could not supply the demand of the whole country, so it often happened that there was none to be had—a sad state of things, for the populace generally was fond of its beer.

At Nish the supply was dealt with carefully. You could not have it before eleven o'clock, and it used to amuse me to see the good citizens collecting together at about half-past ten in the various hotels and cafés, sitting patiently at the little tables that were quite bare of their usual array of glasses. On the stroke of the hour the waiters would rush round with filled mugs; but there was only a limited supply of the beverage, and the thirsty soul was lucky if he could obtain a second glass, for by half-past

eleven it was probably exhausted. Then there was no more to be had till six o'clock in the evening.

This closing of the hotels and cafés during certain hours was not solely due to the inadequate supply of beer. It was a regulation that had been put in force by the sanitary authorities during the typhus epidemic, and had not been removed as was the case in other towns—such as Skoplje, for instance. In the early part of our stay at the latter town these regulations were very strict. Of course they did not affect us particularly, busy at the hospital, but there was a shop where they made very delicious little cakes, and it was hard upon the ladies that these were unprocurable at the time when they were most wanted—tea-time. All shops and places where people might gather together and so spread infection were closed during certain hours; as with the beer, one had to wait till six o'clock for the cakes.

Which reminds me of the great desire we had during the hungry days of the retreat for sweets and cakes and such like—perhaps from human perversity since they were unprocurable, perhaps because one's system really did cry out for something of the sort. I know I simply craved for jam—yet I never touch it at home. And I laughed—but it was sympathetic laughter—when a certain lady who was with us exclaimed pathetically: "Oh, what wouldn't I give for a nice roly-poly pudding!" She spoke with real

emotion—yet I cannot imagine that anything half so commonplace as a " roly-poly pudding " ever showed itself upon her table in England.

And in this connection I can recall a tragic moment when, on a long motor drive when we had had very little indeed to eat, I triumphantly produced a box of Turkish delight which I had been able to purchase—for an extravagant sum —at the town where we had spent the night. The tragedy came in when we found that the sweetmeat was mouldy and bad. It will give some idea of our hunger when I mention that, despite this fact, the greater part of the contents of that box was consumed.

Luckily I don't think we were ever without sugar—though we had to pay very heavily for it at times.

To return to the average Serbian hotel. You must not expect anything in the way of sitting-room accommodation. There is always a large common-room which is usually open to outsiders as a café, and here you will find all classes harmonizing in a truly democratic spirit. The room will lack all adornment except the invariable portraits of the King and the Crown Prince, and perhaps an assortment of cinema posters. As for the sanitary arrangements, they are of the most primitive order.

We had stayed a couple of days at the Nish hotel on our way to Pirot, and it was there that we saw the last of our late chief surgeon, Captain Armstrong. On his return from Albania, his



Capt. Fergus Armstrong, F.R.C.S.

time with the First British Field Hospital having expired, he had found useful work open to him at Skoplje. He had become Surgeon-in-Chief to Lady Paget's hospital, where, as I have heard from other sources, he earned the esteem of every one. In those days—it is a curious fact—we did not anticipate heavy fighting at Skoplje, and so we begged Captain Armstrong to give up his new appointment and come on to Pirot with us; but this he was unable to do. As matters turned out, he was in the thick of it before we were.

He gave us some interesting particulars about the Serbian expedition into Albania, which had been successful in every respect, culminating with the practical occupation of Durazzo. Here he had lunched with Essad Pasha, who, it appeared, had now come to an agreement with Serbia and was ready to act harmoniously with the Allies.

From all that I have heard since then Essad Pasha has kept his word honestly. There were many occasions when he afforded help to the Serbs during their retreat, and his army—I believe it consisted of some 5000 men—was never hostile, unless it were in isolated instances beyond his control. It was the Catholic Albanians, who do not recognize Essad Pasha, who opposed the passage of the Serbs through their country, and who were guilty of the acts of brigandage and murder that I shall have occasion to refer to later on.

I have often heard Nish referred to as "a big village." The expression is not accurate. Nish bears no resemblance to a village—it is far more suggestive, with its rows of small, unpretentious houses, of a suburb of some large city. At first sight it is just as commonplace and unattractive. Nish in winter and in unfavourable weather is one of the most depressing places possible to imagine. The mud of the streets is a veritable nightmare. Some one once argued with me that Nish would eventually develop into a fine city; it may, for its situation is all that could be desired, but every house of it would have to be pulled down first.

The market is interesting, but cannot campare in colour or variety with that of Skoplje. It takes place in a vast square right in the middle of the town—a square that it seems impossible to avoid, wherever you may be going. You have to cross it under a baking hot sun or in pelting rain, as the case may be—and I don't know which is the more unpleasant. On market days there is such a heterogeneous mass of carts and oxen and peasant folk with goods of every variety for sale that it is not easy to get across at all.

There is one public institution at Nish which we shall always remember with gratitude—its bathing establishment. We had baths at Nish. That is about two months ago, and we have not seen a bath since. One would think that a town like Scutari was capable of supplying

this want—but it is not so, for I have searched it from end to end in vain. I can vividly recall when we were at Podgoritza, how envious we were of a friend who had been to Cettinje, where he was a guest at the Embassy. He boasted that he had had eleven baths. I promptly swore that when I got a chance I would have twelve.

I wonder when that chance will come!

The baths at Nish are quite luxurious—large basins sunk into the floor with steps leading down to them, and fitted up with hot and cold water douches. The trouble is that they are badly ventilated, so that the heat, on leaving the bath, is almost intolerable.

There are two baths in most of the apartments, and "mixed bathing" is by no means vetoed. A bashful young friend of mine once accompanied a lady to the baths, and their mutual alarm may be imagined when they discovered that it was taken for granted that they proposed to share a room. When he explained as best he could, it was pointed out to him that all the other baths were occupied, and it was really quite unnecessary to wait, since there were two to be had. That he insisted upon waiting seemed to afford amusement and surprise.

There were very few English to be seen in Nish while we were there. They had already taken their departure in one direction or another. A spirit of unrest was abroad in the town, and just as at Pirot the streets were always filled

with refugees who had come tramping in from the country, carrying with them their humble possessions. They wore a hunted look, these poor people; they had left their homes behind them, and were going they knew not where.

More pitiful still it was to see the wounded soldiers tramping on the country roads. They were those who had found no room in the hospitals and who were trying to make for their own homes. It is easy to surmise that even in this early stage of the tragedy there were many who failed to achieve their object. One would meet them in ox-wagons too—men who were unable to walk.

No doubt the Nish hospitals were in a terrible state. There is a large one near the station, and it had been arranged that this should be taken over by one of the American "missions," but there was a long and ominous delay before any of the new staff were permitted to visit the hospital at all. I went there with the chief surgeon, but we were politely told that we could not enter the wards until everything was in readiness, and that would not be for another day or two. Remembering that all our poor patients from Pirot had been sent to Nish, and that wounded men must have been pouring in from other directions, one can imagine the difficulties that the hospital administration was having to contend with—and that they did not wish for a stranger like myself to see what was going on.

I fancy the Americans did not, in the end,

remain at Nish. They collected their cars, and eventually got through to Salonika by way of Prishtina and Monastir. There was an idea at this time that Skoplje had been, or would be, relieved, and they wished to make for that town if possible.

I accompanied a couple of these gentlemen in one of their cars on a somewhat adventurous trip to Krushervatz. They went to retrieve another car which had broken down there, and which they hoped to be able to patch up and bring back. My object in going was mainly to secure some of our property which was with the general hospital stores; we did not know that the unit had not, in fact, remained at Krushervatz at all.

That day is fixed in my mind as the first when I went really hungry. We had made an early start, and I had taken little breakfast, believing that I could get all I needed at Krushervatz. But there was really nothing to be had.

Krushervatz was in a state of upheaval. The Germans were close upon it, and it was expecting to be bombarded at any time. The common-room of the hotel presented an unforgettable spectacle. I saw the same thing many times afterwards, but this was my first experience.

It had been given up to refugees. They had crowded into it with their belongings, and there was hardly a foot of free space to move about in. They sat disconsolately among their bundles. Some lay at full length—worn out—asleep. Every chair was occupied; those who could not

sit down stood in huddled groups; the atmosphere, combined of unclean humanity, tobacco, and "rakia," was sickening. I had come to get something to eat, but I could not have taken food even if it had been obtainable—which it was not.

By dint of long inquiry I found that a member of our unit had been left behind with the stores, Mr. Drew—one of the dressers. He still hoped to obtain transport for their removal, but things were looking very black. From him I obtained some brandy, of which I stood badly in need; also some biscuits. Then we went to the stores, and I secured the objects of which we were in most need. I had reason to regret afterwards that I did not take away more, but I was still under the impression that we should have to pass again by way of Krushervatz. In any case it would have made no difference, since the things saved from Krushervatz would have been lost at Nish.

One thing I did take which proved of immense value that same night—an electric torch. How we should have got back to Nish without it I don't know, for our lights gave out absolutely, and it was a pitch-dark night. The road was very bad—really dangerous in parts, owing to broken bridges—and it was a good six hours' run. I doubt if we could have accomplished it safely had it not been for that electric torch.

The "Quartier Général" was at this time installed at Krushervatz. I had had a piece of

business to transact there, and the way I was sent from office to office—not always in the same building, but at another end of the town—reminded me forcibly of the same sort of thing at home. We do not, after all, hold a monopoly in red tape. I must say that every one was most anxious to assist me, and under the circumstances—the whole place was cleared on the following day—it is wonderful that I met with so much consideration.

As for Mr. Drew, we were to meet him again later on at Prizren.

It seemed strange to get back to Nish and find it so peaceful—on the surface—after the disorganization of Krushervatz. But naturally alarm was spreading, though the authorities were doing everything in their power to prevent it. Among other courses, they issued an official leaflet in which the populace of Nish was incited to calm on the plea that the town was in no danger; the motive for the manifesto was excellent, but it was a sorry pretence, since the fighting had drawn too near for people to be deceived. Nish actually fell four or five days after the issue of that appeal.

The actual war conditions were far more critical in those days than we were aware of. To begin with, we knew nothing whatever of the imminent danger with which we had all been threatened by the possible fall of Prishtina; I have already referred to this and to the successful action of General Boiovitch and the Division of Morava

in the south by which alone the means of escape for the whole army was kept open.

I have also spoken of the heroism of the Morava Division. The second regiment distinguished itself most particularly. This regiment had earned for itself the name of "Zelesni Polx"—"Regiment of Iron"—among the Bulgars. Its brave commander, Colonel Milivoje Stozanovitch and his adjutant both fell the same day in the fierce fighting for the position named Staratcha, near Lasarevatz—which is to the north-east of Valievo. The first regiment, under the most popular of commanders, General Gojkovitch—called "Tchitcha," an untranslatable term of endearment, by his men—was no less renowned; the fighting between Planka and the Mlava—north-east of Nish—in which this regiment was mainly concerned, was perhaps the fiercest of the war. It is very certain that the Bulgars, who lost heavily, could not have stood up against it; but what could the outcome be for the Serbs except retreat when they were threatened by an enemy in the rear as well as by that which they were so gallantly facing?

The cordon was tightening. The Austro-Germans were doing their utmost to sweep down to the west and, by joining up with the Bulgars in the south, to cut off the Serbian retreat. The way out was becoming each day more narrow. And still we asked ourselves, day after day, when the Allies were coming, what the Allies were doing.

Of course we were also deeply concerned at the

failure of Greece to fulfil her obligation to her ally, and the official excuse given out for not doing so appeared to us most utterly ignoble. "Our defensive treaty with Serbia did not provide for the contingency that she should be attacked by Bulgaria in conjunction with other Powers." That is, in effect, what was said. Later, I had an opportunity of discussing the matter with a prominent Greek doctor, who presented the case in a somewhat different light.

Greece, he said, in the early part of the war was all in favour of the Allies. She would have joined us had we allowed her to do so. (This confirmed remarkably the view that had been propounded to me, months earlier, on the *Saidiah*.) "I think," he maintained, "that the attitude of Great Britain was essentially honourable—she did not want to drag the small States into the horrors of war without absolute necessity. But she was blunt about it, and gave offence. She should have prevaricated a bit—diplomatically. In the East we don't understand such direct honesty in affairs of vital importance. In fact"—here he smiled—"we might almost say that the honest diplomat or politician is the one who tells the most lies—for he knows that no one will believe him.

"The consequence was," he went on, "that you alienated a lot of Greek sympathy, and when, necessity arising, you acted in an arbitrary manner, seizing Greek ships and Greek territory, you alienated a lot more. The Germans saw their

advantage, and were not slow to seize it. They have succeeded, despite Belgium, in making my country believe that the British claim to defend small States is not justified. We have our own experience, and we have seen your failure to assist Serbia. We do not appreciate being made a cat's-paw for the Allies at such a vital moment—laying ourselves open, in all probability, to the same fate that has befallen Serbia. That is how the matter is argued at Athens, where there is now a firm belief, fostered by German agents, that the Central Powers will win the war. We are sorry for Serbia, but if we did not hold to our part of the convention, she also, unfortunately, was unable to hold to hers. She could not, naturally, supply the men whom she had promised to collaborate with us—nor could the Allies fill the breach on her behalf. Had they done so, things might have been different."

That is briefly how our friend stated the case for his country. It made things a bit clearer to my mind, but what the actual facts may be I have no means of knowing.

By now things were beginning to look very serious at Nish. Day after day we noticed fresh shutters going up over the shop windows. Many shops were shut altogether, and there was a feverish anxiety in those that remained open to dispose of their goods even at a great sacrifice. Then was the time to buy at bargain prices—valuable furs could be had, for instance, for next to nothing. The tradespeople who contemplated

flight wanted all the ready money they could possibly collect.

On the other hand, there were those who proposed to remain and carry on their business after the feared enemy occupation. Their main concern was to safeguard the money in their possession, which was practically certain to be confiscated if the Germans or the Bulgarians should enter the city. A friend of ours had a curious experience in this respect. He had made one or two small purchases at a shop, and found himself short of ready money. He was a complete stranger to the proprietors of the shop—all they could know of him was that he was English and attached to a British "mission."

"You have a long way to travel," they told him, "and you will need money. Let us provide you with some. Here are 3000 francs—£120—in cash. They are quite at your disposition—and there is more should you require it. All we ask in return is your cheque for a like amount on a London bank, which we can cash when the war is over."

Our friend, however, did not care to saddle himself with this liability, but what an opportunity for an adventurer!

Our flight from Nish, when the inevitable time came, was even more hurried than it was from Pirot. Colonel Borissavljevitch, who was "Chef de Santé"—head of the Serbian Red Cross—had kindly undertaken to give us a lift in one of the ambulance cars, and when he arrived to fetch us

he was in a state of great excitement—there was no time to be spared.

We were in the street, which was in something of a turmoil. There had been some looting—shops had been broken into and their contents thrown out into the road to be scrambled for. How could the mob be restrained when all organization had necessarily come to an end? It speaks much for Serbian credit that there was so little rioting and robbery—before the entrance of the invading army, for as to what happened afterwards we are still without definite information.

We were talking to a very old gentleman who kept a small general shop in the main street. He was in despair—a tragic figure. He was too old to take to flight, nor had he anywhere to fly to. He had lost two of his sons in the previous Bulgarian War, and he, like every one else, was afraid of the Bulgarians.

"They will take all I possess," he moaned. "They have killed my sons—perhaps they will kill me too."

We tried to find words of encouragement, but it was no easy task. For he knew by now, as well as we did, that Serbia had been deserted by her friends, that she must suffer and bleed alone.

Yet there was no bitterness in his tone as he commented upon the fact. "I do not know why your great country has failed us," he said, with quiet resignation, "but there must be some reason—some strong reason—which we shall understand later on."

He had not lost his trust in England, this old man, though ruin was staring him in the face.

He pressed some picture post cards into our hands as a parting souvenir. They were taken at hazard from a heterogeneous stock. And it was a strange chance, almost an omen, that the first one we glanced at, a reproduction from a famous picture, should represent the Retreat from Moscow. But we hardly realized then how nearly the horrors of that famous retreat were to be repeated.

It was during this little scene that Colonel Borissavljevitch, with the car, arrived. "You must get in at once," he commanded. "There is no time to be lost."

Here was a dilemma! Our luggage was at the hotel; also we had written a small cheque, and had not yet received the change for it. But we were not allowed to fetch the one or wait for the other.

"I should leave my own son behind if he were not here," declared the Colonel. And so, as self-preservation was the first instinct, we had to jump into the car just as we were, leaving all our possessions to fall into the hands of the Bulgarians —unless the hotel-keeper has been able to preserve them for us.

He was a queer little man, that hotel-keeper, quite a character, and he had a wonderful invention which he was anxious to bring to England to exploit. It was—according to him—a simple machine the use of which must not only

terminate the war but revolutionize the world. Nothing was wanted but the necessary capital to make models.

He was very sincere, absolutely convinced of the infallibility of his invention. A dreamer, no doubt, and self-deceived—but who can tell? He vowed that he would take his secret with him to the grave unless he could make such terms for it as he considered just. The supposition, of course, is not to be taken seriously, but nature has many mysteries yet to be revealed. What if this old man should carry out his threat, and his discovery —it was allied to perpetual motion—be of real worth? At any rate, as far as we were concerned, his very enthusiasm made him interesting, a character to be remembered.

Colonel Borissavljevitch, who assisted us in our flight from Nish, may, perhaps, later on, have recalled those words about leaving his son behind. He was obliged to do so in very fact at Petch (Ipek), not daring to let the boy, who was only twelve years old and already ill from privation and fatigue, face the terrible journey across the mountains of Montenegro.

It was late afternoon when we got away from Nish. There was a steep hill to be climbed just outside the town, and it was a matter of difficulty for the car, a heavy ambulance and very much out of condition, to scale it. We all had to walk, and there were none of us who did not glance back anxiously over our shoulders as we went.

From the top of the hill there was a fine view.

Nish looked peaceful and really beautiful in the setting sun. But the hills to the north and east looked dark and ominous, and now and then there came a puff of smoke and the boom of cannon grated on the ear. The enemy, indeed, was at the gate.

CHAPTER VIII

PROKUPLJE

THE road we were taking was the only possible one out of Nish. It led south-west to Prokuplje. North, east, and a little farther to the south, every way was closed. As it was we had to come measurably close to Lescovatz, where there had been severe fighting.

Lescovatz, indeed, had already fallen once while we were at Nish, but it was retaken after a fierce attack by the Second Serbian Army.

It was dark when we reached our destination. Luckily, through the kind offices of one of our Staff friends, a room had been taken for us, and the same gentleman provided us with some supper from his own rations; for all the food with which we had supplied ourselves at Nish—plenty of it, for the necessity of having a stock had been pointed out to us—was left behind in our hurried flight.

I had saved a little hand-bag—no more. Alice, luckily, had handed the most essential article of what luggage was left to her to Captain Gwozditch's orderly, in order that it might be brought on with the army transport; so she came off better than I did. On the following day we

made an effort to regain our lost belongings—for a report came in that Nish had not yet actually fallen, and a car was setting out with the object of running into the town if possible; but it did not get farther than the outskirts, so our hope was doomed to disappointment.

We spent nine days at Prokuplje, a day or two longer than we had been at Nish. It was an exciting time, for the fortunes of war were still swaying, and we had not yet given up hope of a surprise in the way of a strong offensive on the part of the Allies in the south. It will be understood that by now we had no newspapers or any sort of definite information from outside; all we had to go by was the information as to the military position that could be retailed to us by our friends on the Staff.

We knew pretty accurately what was going on in the near field of operations, but everything farther off was very vague and uncertain. Also our hopes were often aroused only to be dashed down again. We knew that instructions were constantly being given to the officers—presumably upon good authority—to encourage their men with the promise of speedy assistance: "You must hold out for another fortnight—another ten days—another week—then all will be well. They are coming." The men believed it all at first, but the tale was told too often.

"I am sick of deceiving my brave soldiers," an officer friend of ours once said. "Can you wonder that they are beginning to lose patience?"

It was the same with us: we believed the stories at first. Indeed, we would not have hurried away from the country even if we had been able to do so with ease and safety, for we could not cast aside the hope that one day the tide of battle would turn and that the Serbian army would sweep back victoriously over the ground which it had vacated, and that we should have the privilege of sharing its triumph. Not till we left Petch did we utterly abandon this hope.

Sometimes we discussed with one or two picked officer friends what we should do "if all was lost," and it is remarkable what melodramatic ideas we used to develop, quite seriously, upon the subject. It was quite decided that we would never allow ourselves to fall into the hands of the enemy—rather than that we would "take to the mountains." This, of course, meant that we would become outlaws, liable to be shot at sight. We had the two chargers, Pigeon and Herzig, and if any one who proposed to share the adventure was not possessed of a horse, he must just help himself; it would not be difficult in the mêlée of flight. As for food, we would have to forage for ourselves in the villages, and not be too particular as to our methods of obtaining what we wanted.

It is, I think, very significant of the abnormal conditions in which we were living that projects such as this were mooted and discussed as real feasible propositions.

Even at Scutari—only a few days ago—wild

ideas on the same lines have been proposed. We have heard that it will be very difficult to get off by sea—that there are no more ships coming across from Italy—that Austrian boats are patrolling the coast. How are we going to escape ?

The idea is that we shall disguise ourselves in Albanian dress and try our luck in a rowing-boat, following the coast to Valona. I fancy the proposal is on a par with taking to the mountains, but we shall see what fate has in store for us.

Perhaps these rather wild fancies are in keeping with the Serbian character; I do not doubt for a moment that the men who spoke of helping themselves to horses and food—showing no respect whatever for the real owners; ready to kill them if need be—meant all that they said. What else need one expect when one remembers the ancestry and the traditions of the race ? It is little more than a century since the majority of Serbs, if they were not downtrodden peasants, were actually outlaws—men who were held together only by one common cause, hatred of the Turk. And those who are of more gentle birth, those whose ancestors, long exiled from their own country, have eventually returned to it, bringing with them a greater measure of refinement, is it not likely that they should absorb something of the national spirit ?

Of course it would be absurd to dogmatize on the subject of character where Serbian gentry are concerned. One may talk of " a nation of peasants," and in many respects the phrase

is true; at the same time it must be remembered that the average well-to-do Serb has studied in one or another of the capitals of Europe, or, failing that, at Belgrade, where there is an excellent university. The standard of education required for the army is particularly high. Personally we met with such unaffected courtesy from all classes—in Serbia—that we should not feel we were doing amiss by supplementing the word "gentlemen" to the stock phrase.

One can speak more freely of the actual peasant class; and we had experience of them both in their village homes and as soldiers in the army. I should say their chief characteristics are simplicity, pride, and patriotism. I should add, lack of initiative. The countryman accepts easily the conditions to which he is accustomed, even if they are galling to him, and will make little effort, of his own accord, to change them. If he is a member of a "Zadruga" he will accept, without grumbling, the administration, however harsh, of the accepted chief. For four hundred years he yielded to Turkish thraldom. But once let him have, as a soldier, the opportunity to fight for his independence, then the lack of initiative goes to the wind, and he will sooner die than yield a step. I have pointed out that many a time the painful necessity arose for Serbian officers to shoot down their own men because in the heat of battle they refused to obey the order to retire.

The peasant's pride is in his home and his land,

and he prefers his own methods to any that may be pointed out to him as superior. He is industrious, but will not be hurried; he is anything but the "cut-throat" that we in England have been led to believe—on the contrary, he will entertain you hospitably if you elect to visit him in his own place, and, should you do so, you will find his habits and customs very much the same to-day as they were centuries ago, replete with interest.

Saints' days and holidays are the best times for observing these. Your Serb will take a holiday whenever he can get one, so the Saints' days thus celebrated are of very frequent occurrence. The most important of all is the "Slava," which is the fête of the patron saint of the family. It is always ushered in by a visit from the priest, who sprays with holy water the different members of the family as well as all the rooms of the house. After that a special cake, made of wheat and almonds, is consumed—it is called "kolivo"—and the rest of the day is spent in dancing, the firing of rifles—no fête is complete without plenty of this—feasting, and general gaiety. Plenty of wine and "rakia" will be taken, but there is very little actual drunkenness. I only saw two or three drunken men all the time I was in the country. One came and sat by my side in the café of the Nish hotel, and solemnly informed me, a total stranger, that he had a terrible secret to confide. The secret turned out to be an obvious one—that he was very drunk.

Another case occurred at the same hotel. The man was a fierce-looking Comitaji, and he forced his way up to the bedrooms, demanding that he and his little son should be provided with shelter, which had been denied him, not, as he presumed, because he was of inferior class, and drunk—but because the rooms were all occupied. He was heavily armed, and seemed very disposed to make use of his rifle, so the hotel people were terribly afraid of him. I doubt if I can claim great courage as a quality of the Serbian civilian. Captain Gwozditch and I went out and interfered, since things were beginning to look menacing, and the sight of our uniform had its effect. He went away quietly, but no words were too bad to express his contempt for the hotel people —he called them Jews, which perhaps they were —who would not show hospitality to a man who had come in from the field of battle. He was quite a picturesque figure, and so was his little boy, who could not have been more than twelve, but who was already as much a soldier as his father, and who carried his own rifle, slung over his shoulder, with the ease of a grown man.

There is one trait of the Serbian character which I was constantly noticing, and which is hardly attractive—it is curiosity. Stop in the road and carry on an animated conversation with a friend—you will doubtless find that one or two total strangers will stop too, obviously listening to what you are talking about. Produce a paper for your friend's inspection—the inte-

rested strangers will probably try to get a peep at it over his shoulder. They will be quite surprised if you manifest annoyance at their interference.

The Serbs are keen gamblers. There was a good deal of play among the officers, but it was not for very high stakes—no one was rich enough. The game they affect—I forget its name—is a somewhat intricate one, by no means a mere game of hazard. Every one seems to play it. I was amused one day to hear that the night before the "pope"—the army chaplain—had effectively cleared all the other players out. Certainly he was quite a man of the world, that "pope"—the word corresponds, I fancy, to the French *curé*—and he did not wear his hair in long curls hanging over his neck, as one sees with so many priests of the Eastern Orthodox Church. He accompanied the Staff during the retreat, and was always very kind to us. It must have been terrible for him to carry out his duties under the ghastly conditions that prevailed.

We liked Prokuplje. At ordinary times I should say it was as pleasant a little town as any in Old Serbia. The town follows the general type, but the situation is remarkably picturesque. The "Konak"—used while we were there for the Army Head-quarters—is surrounded by a little park which has a terrace whence one enjoys a beautiful view. The River Toplitza, a tributary of the Morava, winds here out of one valley into another; the hills on either side are covered with a rich vegetation, and one of them is crowned

by an old ruined castle, the home of some marauding "Voyvoda" of days gone by. The white road can be traced as it slopes down to the handsome bridge that spans the river. In some curious way nature here seems to suggest an encroachment of the fierce and barbaric upon quiet peace—perhaps it is because one of the two valleys is so much wilder and more rugged than the other.

The weather was very fine and warm for November, and we often used to sit on this terrace watching the troops as they came pouring into the town across the bridge. There were so many of them that it needed little skill to judge the progress of the campaign.

As a matter of fact there was still pretty heavy fighting, and I find a record in my notes of a decided success—the Morava Division again—at a place called Moramor, in which success Commander Ker's heavy batteries played a prominent part.

Commander Ker brought the guns—four of them—into Prokuplje with some difficulty. The two that had been stationed farthest away had to be destroyed; but it was not before they had done good service. We saw a good deal of Commander Ker, both at this time and afterwards, and knew something of the difficulties that he and his men had to contend with in the removal of the batteries from Belgrade to Prishtina. There were four in all—two five-ton guns to each—and of these one was destroyed at Belgrade, one at Prokuplje, while the remaining two had eventually to be done away with at

Prishtina, since it was impossible to transport them any farther. It is a wonder, indeed, and a fine proof of British quality, that they even got so far; but Commander Ker was animated, like ourselves, by the belief that, long as was the delay, the help of the Allies would materialize in the end.

Of his men he could not speak too highly. I remember his mentioning that not one of them had ever got into trouble with the police at Belgrade, even for trivial causes—which amused me, for there had been various occasions when members of our unit had, quite innocently, run counter to the police—usually for trespassing—and one of our Sisters had once almost got into real trouble for taking photographs in the Belgrade trenches. She came out of it quite triumphantly, however, thanks, no doubt, to an eloquent tongue and an attractive personality. Besides, she was an English nurse, to whom much was permitted.

We had nothing to complain of in the matter of our quarters at Prokuplje—at least, not when we regard them in the light of what we had to put up with afterwards. We occupied what was often described as the finest room in the town, which means that it possessed good beds, carpet, and curtains, and an abundant display upon the walls in the shape of Berlin wool work and picture post cards. It had no stove, however, and the one in the next room, which might have been transferred, was needed by our neighbours, a refugee family, for cooking purposes. Conse-

quently it was here that we had our first experience of a trouble that became very real later on—the effort to keep ourselves warm.

Food also now for the first time became a difficulty. There was really plenty to be had, but the house possessed no servant, and we had no one to do either our marketing or our cooking. The young woman of the house was extremely lazy, and used to protest that it was as much as she could do to look after her father and the children. Nevertheless she spent half her time gossiping in the street, for which, not infrequently, her father would thrash her, and as in retaliation she would bully her little brothers and sisters the whole house used often to resound with ear-splitting and discomfiting howls. So it happened that our food, eventually brought to us every morning, uncooked, by Selam, Captain Gwozditch's orderly—we did not have our own orderly till later—might, or might not, be attended to; if it were, it was usually so badly cooked as to be uneatable; if it were not, we had to do the best we could with it ourselves, which was generally even more fatal in the result. Eventually, however, we found a cook who was quite clever in spite of the poverty of material at her disposition. We shall always maintain a lively recollection of a certain *omelette soufflée* which she turned out for us—it was worthy of the Carlton, and is particularly memorable to us as the last "luxury" of which we partook for many long weeks.

We were very remiss in one respect; it was in failing to purchase supplies while they were still to be got, and we suffered for it—not only upon our next journey, but afterwards, for Prokuplje was the last town upon our route at which preserved foods, chocolate, biscuits, and such like necessary articles of consumption were to be purchased. And even at Prokuplje they were getting scarce; the last tins of sardines we bought came from the private store of the chemist—all the other shops were sold out. So it happened that when the time came to leave Prokuplje we were but poorly provided with stores which were of the very first necessity.

We had had some difficulty with bread as well as with meat. The townspeople were complaining because they could not get it at all. All that was baked was reserved for the army, and there was not nearly enough even for this purpose. There were deplorable scenes every day at the office where the orders were given out. Bread is the staple food of the Serbian peasant, and the fact that it was failing so early made us vaguely realize the coming of that grim shadow which, faint as yet, was destined presently to loom huge and terrible over the whole country.

For ourselves, my uniform served us in good stead. I was able to obtain an order, and from that day until we left Prokuplje we had a fresh loaf every morning.

All this time we were very sanguine of a turn of fortune's wheel. We had heard of Serbian

successes. Consequently we were surprised when we were informed by Captain Gwozditch that we must prepare to leave Prokuplje that very evening.

"Why," we cried, "only a few hours ago we were told that the Bulgarians had had a bad set-back."

"So they have," was the quiet rejoinder. "The Bulgarians won't get here in a hurry. But the Germans may."

Which goes to show that at this period the Serbian army was putting up a gallant fight against foes that were bearing down upon it from all sides. What was the good of beating back the Bulgars when the crushing force of the Austro-Germans, with their heavy artillery, had also to be reckoned with? If it had been only the Bulgars!

As a matter of fact the immediate source of danger was not so much that Prokuplje would fall as that the road to Prishtina—the only route open to the retreating army—should be cut. Koshumlja was threatened, and if Koshumlja were to be taken we should all be caught like rats in a trap. We were always getting that impression—rats in a trap.

The Serbian successes had been genuine enough. I have mentioned the battle at Moramor. Lescovatz had been retaken, and the Bulgarians had been driven out of Nish—not that the latter victory proved of any use, for the Germans immediately stepped in in their place.



THE OFFICERS OF THE FAMOUS 2ND REGIMENT

But in spite of all this Prokuplje must be evacuated.

We were sorry to go in such a hurry, though perhaps we should have regretted our comfortable quarters still more had it not been that our host had elected to slaughter three large pigs that day in the yard just beneath our window, and so all the resultant processes, however disgusting they may have been to us, were thrust upon our view.

The Administrative Staff of the Second Army were leaving Prokuplje that evening, so we were told; the Operative Staff would take its departure early the following morning, and probably, for strategic reasons, follow a path across the hills instead of the main road. There would be room for us in one of the cars, and we were to be informed by Selam, in the absence of his master, who would be occupied with military business till late that night, at what time we were to hold ourselves in readiness. No doubt it would be about six o'clock, certainly not later than seven. With luck it should not take us more than twenty-four hours to make Prishtina, whither we were bound; but the road in places was very bad, and so we must allow for longer, and if we had not provisions enough in hand for the journey, it would be wise to lay in some more.

We reviewed our stock. We had bread, cocoa, and tea, a bottle of Greek brandy, sugar, and three tins of sardines. Thinking things over, we calculated that if we had a good dinner before we left

we should require nothing more; if all was well we should dine the following night at Prishtina.

Thus we decided in our ignorance. We imagined we might get things on the way; we were confident that at Prishtina we should obtain all we wanted. Bread and three tins of sardines promised ample food till the following night. We had certainly been indulging rather freely in sardines lately, but we were not really tired of them. "How do you like sardines?" we had been facetiously asked the day before. And we could honestly reply that we liked them. Nor did we have time to tire of them, for we never saw any more till we reached Scutari.

We waited patiently that evening for the arrival of Selam, who was to take us to our car, and we did not worry till eight o'clock struck and he had not arrived. Even then we were not particularly concerned, for we concluded that the Staff must have postponed their departure. But that was not so; Selam had mistaken his orders, and we were left behind.

We learnt this when, about nine o'clock, Captain Gwozditch himself appeared, having found out that there had been some mistake. He was terribly worried, for it was absolutely necessary for us to get off at once. Yet what was to be done, since the cars had already started, all the carriages were requisitioned, and at that time of night and in the pressure of flight it was impossible to arrange for horses? There was one at our disposition, our beloved charger,

Pigeon, but we were two people, and we had our modicum of luggage as well. It seemed as if we must walk or travel by ox-wagon, but anything of the sort was decidedly dangerous, as it was imperatively necessary to pass Koshumlja with the smallest possible delay.

For two hours, with Captain Gwozditch, we beat the town in search of a conveyance, and at last luck befriended us. We found some motor-vans that were going to Prishtina with a heavy load of petrol, and the officer who was arranging the consignment happened to be a cousin of Captain Gwozditch. It was arranged that we should travel in one of these lorries, and so we were hurriedly packed in with some half-dozen other refugees, and by midnight we were off. It was by no means comfortable, and sleep was impossible because of the jolting of the car on the rough road; but we comforted ourselves with the reflection that we should not have another night of it. We were travelling at a fair rate—not till the following day did we realize that that was because we had started late, and the great mass of traffic was in front of us.

CHAPTER IX

PRISHTINA

VERY solemn and impressive in many ways was that midnight flight from Prokuplje. It was a good hour from the time we took our seats on the motor-lorry before we could actually get away; there was not very much room inside the car because of the tins of petrol, but they kept on piling up more things, and two or three men got in as well. They did not interfere with us, but curled up as best they could among the cans, wrapped in their coats, and tried to go to sleep. There were two other lorries besides ours, and we were drawn up in the market-place—facing the road by which every one had to pass.

It was a cold night, fine and starry, with the moon in its first quarter. The houses of the square stood out in bold relief against a purple background; there were flickering lights in many of them, and here and there in the great open space wood fires had been kindled, round which one could see the dim shadows of men and horses. There were plenty of ox-wagons as well, the patient oxen for the most part lying down between the shafts, snatching a little rest

while they might. The low murmur of voices was always in one's ears.

Detachments of the army were still passing along the road. Some of them formed up in the square and started from thence—always very silently; others, cavalry for the most part, appeared at the head of the broad street that led to the "Konak"—in the valley below which were most of the encampments—passed like some ghostly procession of dead and gone warriors across the square, and were swallowed up in the night. But hardly were they gone when others filled their place—others and yet others. Once or twice there came the crack of a rifle and muttered cries. I do not know what was happening; we could not leave our places to find out; but the sound fell very eerily upon our ears as a part of an impressive heart-racking whole.

It would have been strange—quite apart from the discomfort of our position—if we had slept much that night.

We reached Koshumlja at about eight in the morning, and remained there for a couple of hours. We had fondly imagined we should find an inn of sorts, where we could obtain some breakfast, but there was nothing of the kind, nor could we purchase any food or wine, as we had relied upon being able to do. We were, however, most hospitably entertained by the family of the local chemist, whose shop we had merely entered to make some small purchase. They gave us bread, cheese, sausage, and coffee, had our muddy

boots cleaned for us—the mud in Koshumlja was something to marvel at!—and generally provided for our comfort before we started off again. Not a farthing would they accept in exchange. They were genial kindly folk, true Serbs, and later on we had frequent occasion to contrast their hospitality with the rough and money-grubbing methods of the Montenegrin.

They told us a lot of interesting things, among others that a few days earlier they had been asked by the local authorities to prepare a meal for a couple of distinguished travellers. No names were mentioned. They had done as they were bid, and were now quite sure that it was the King himself whom they had entertained.

On leaving Koshumlja that morning we ourselves saw the King. He was riding with a small retinue, hardly an assumption of state, and to myself particularly the little cavalcade had something about it that was infinitely pathetic. A brief quotation from my actual diary will explain why.

"At Koshumlja to-day we saw the King. Curiously enough, this is the first time that I have come across him since I have been in Serbia, though Alice has seen him at Tapola. He is a fine old man, and neither trouble, sickness, nor age has bowed him. And meeting him thus, my mind goes back—how many years it may be I should be afraid to guess. I was a small boy, spending my holidays with my people at Vevy on the Lake of Geneva, and at the

hotel we struck up an acquaintance with Prince Peter Kara-Georgevitch. He was then in the prime of life, tall, dark, handsome—not yet married. He used to talk to us quite unaffectedly of his hopes and ambitions. King Milan was, of course, the prime enemy.

" ' One day I shall come into my own.' I can quite well remember him saying that.

" And it was true. Destiny—call it what you will—gave him the coveted throne. And now, a dozen years later, he has lived to see a fresh shuffle of the cards. How they will fall it is still for time to show."

We made but poor progress that day, and it was not to be wondered at. The congestion of traffic was amazing. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that from Koshumlja to Prishtina there was an unbroken stream of vehicles of the most varied kind—though, of course, the ox-wagon predominated enormously. With these were soldiers and civilians on horseback; soldiers and civilians on foot; oxen, laden and unladen; pack-horses; buffaloes, donkeys, and mules; dogs on the leash or running with their masters; man, woman, child, and beast jostling each other in the confusion of hurried flight. It was not so much the retreat of an army as of a small nation.

Yet all was orderly and in the main good-tempered. The soldiers were kept to their respective trains, and were well under the control of their officers. There were as yet no ghastly

roadside sights—but now and again came presages of what was to be—the fall of a tired horse, the overturning of a cart; and once we were sickened by seeing a couple of frightened oxen, with wagon attached, precipitate themselves completely over the low parapet of a bridge into the torrent that flowed below. There was little or no excitement, and the empty space was rapidly filled up; it was not well to fall out of rank if one could help it.

We soon gave up hope of reaching Prishtina that night. Midday to-morrow, the chauffeur promised us. In this confidence we consumed two of our tins of sardines during the day—it was not much for lunch and dinner—leaving the third for breakfast. And therein was a catastrophe, for when we came to open the tin, hungry after another wakeful and uncomfortable night, the contents proved to be hopelessly bad. We made a breakfast off dry bread, and it did not improve our tempers to see our companions devour a pig's head between them. There was something insulting in the way they picked the bones. The interior of the car, by the way, had been cleared a bit by now, and we had room for more passengers; there were quite half a dozen besides ourselves.

And that day progress was slower than ever; we did not seem able to make any way at all. By midday we can scarcely have advanced half a dozen miles. It became increasingly clear that we should have to spend a third night among the

petrol cans—if not a fourth and fifth. That was bad enough in itself, but what about food?

Our companions did not seem to mind a bit. They were in no hurry, and, considering that they had lost practically all they possessed in the world, wonderfully cheerful. But we were anxious to get to Prishtina and rejoin our friends, who might be concerned about us. We were nervous on their account too—for the Operative Staff at least—since, though there had been no attack upon the main road, we had heard a great deal of firing going on among the hills, and we knew that the route by which they proposed to travel came at times—especially at the old Turkish frontier which we were approaching—very near our own.

It was near the frontier, as we learnt afterwards, that the Staff had a very ghastly experience. They came, quite unexpectedly, upon the mutilated bodies of some fifty men, Serbs, not regular soldiers, but transport bearers and drivers—practically unarmed. They had been massacred by Bulgars, a skirmishing party that had been shown a path across the mountains by some treacherous Albanians, and which had fallen unawares upon the unfortunate Serbs. The brutality of the Bulgars upon this occasion, brutality as to which there can be no doubt whatever, was on a par with all the other stories that have percolated through.

They tied their unfortunate victims—defenceless men, be it remembered—hand and foot, and

then proceeded to slash them to pieces with their swords. Having perpetrated these murders and secured all the booty that they could carry away, they escaped by the same way that they had come.

No punishment could be meted out to them, but it is good to know that the treacherous Albanians were caught and promptly shot, while their houses—a more drastic punishment still, according to local views—were burned to the ground.

No wonder we heard firing among the hills!

About midday we determined to abandon the lorry and to make our way on to the next village —some dozen miles—on foot. We did not feel disposed to face another night of discomfort; but what put the finishing-touch was the introduction into the car of a little live pig that was destined to be a new travelling companion until such time as he should be killed, cooked, and eaten. We had no food left of our own, but we felt that we could never regale ourselves upon that pig—even if we were given the opportunity.

We found an officer friend who gave us a couple of soldiers to carry our baggage, and we set out to thread our way through the stream of traffic; but we did not walk very far, for coming presently across a carriage, empty except for a load of forage, we determined to commandeer it. The driver informed us that he belonged to a cavalry division attached to the First Army, and if his commandant had no objection to

our intrusion, he, for his part, had none either.

Presently the commandant himself came along. He knew us by repute, as did most of the other officers, and the result was that we were cordially invited to ride with the division, and offered hospitality and refreshment for the night.

It was, however, well after seven o'clock, and dark, by the time we had crossed the old frontier and descended upon the broad plain of Kossovo. Having practically had nothing to eat or drink all day—and very little the day before—we rejoiced when at last camp was reached and we found ourselves sitting beside a huge wood fire—it was bitterly cold—waiting for our supper to be cooked for us, and for our tent to be pitched.

We did not reach camp, by the way, without some excitement. There came the sound of shooting, suddenly, out of the darkness, but uncomfortably near; our friend the commandant was riding by our side at the moment. He apologized and galloped off sharply. Then came more shooting. We learnt afterwards that it was a case of Albanian snipers, and that due punishment had been meted out here also.

Our supper consisted of "confection," as the tinned meat supplied to the army is called. When cooked it is quite good, as each tin, besides meat, contains an ample supply of soup. We had Nestlé's milk too, and now for the first time we learnt to appreciate this commodity at its true value. What we should have done without

Nestlé's later on it would be hard to say. Our friend was very apologetic about the entertainment he was able to offer us, and kept repeating that it would have been very different under other circumstances, but we were able, with absolute truth, to assure him that we had rarely enjoyed a meal so much.

We might have added, "or slept so well." We were accommodated in a little "dog-kennel" tent, but there was a comfortable mattress and plenty of wraps, and though the rain fell in torrents during the night it did not affect our rest. We only felt a sense of rejoicing that we were no longer wedged in among the petrol cans, cold and uncomfortable, and in unavoidable proximity to uncleanly companions, not forgetting the pig. As a matter of fact, had we remained in the lorry we should have been another three days *en route*.

Our kind friend's hospitality did not end with the night. The carriage was placed at our disposition the next morning, and starting at six o'clock we reached Prishtina by noon. There was no breakfast in camp for anybody, but we were provided with "Peksimeat," as the hard army biscuit is called, water, and cognac as we drove along.

And as we came to Prishtina our spirits revived and we told each other that, after all, there was still hope for Serbia. There would be a concentration of the three armies upon the historic plain of Kossovo, and perhaps if things went

well in the south a junction might yet be established between the Serbs and the Allies. It would be a grand thing, we argued, if Kossovo should once again be the scene of a tremendous battle, Kossovo which is already the centre of all that is best in Serbian legend and story, and if at Kossovo Serbia should vindicate her honour and re-enter into possession of her own.

We found the Administrative Staff already settled in a so-called hotel—a marvel of dirt and discomfort. They were all glad to see us, for they thought we had got lost and might have been taken prisoners. We were told that the town was very full and that we would have difficulty in finding rooms. We were offered one at the hotel for that night only—and we could not have it quite to ourselves, for one of the beds had been allotted to an officer who was expected that day.

Under these circumstances, I applied to the prefect of the town—a wise course which I invariably adopted when in difficulty, and was never disappointed in receiving the greatest consideration, for which, no doubt, two factors were responsible: that I was English, and that I wore the uniform of a senior Serbian officer.

Notice, however, was short, and the prefect had nothing to offer us for that night but an empty and unfurnished Turkish house. We went to have a look at it, but it was so cold and gloomy, so silent and lonely, that, prepared as we were to put up with most things, we shivered

and got away as quickly as we could. I think we were wise, for the house was not near the centre of the town, and the general population of Prishtina, essentially Albanian, was certainly not to be trusted.

Our friend the prefect had promised to do better for us the next day, so in the meanwhile we returned to the hotel, where we took possession of the room that had been first offered to us. We had it to ourselves, after all, though I rather fancy that our proposed companion looked in in the middle of the night and, finding the room occupied, fled in dismay.

Our eventual lodging was very reminiscent of an attic as one sees it portrayed on the melodramatic stage. All the essential points were there: the bare floor, the damp-stained walls, the rickety furniture, the broken window stuffed with paper, and, most significant of all, the candle in an empty bottle. I have always understood that a candle in an empty bottle, in melodrama, is the surest sign of poverty—just as to light a cigarette from the stump of one that has just been consumed is an infallible token of villainy.

We often had to make use of the candle in the bottle. Lamp oil was not always obtainable, and as for candles themselves, they soon became atrociously dear. Two francs apiece is what we had to pay for them at Scutari.

Our Prishtina apartment, however, was clean, and it had a stove—a most important point,

since the weather set in intensely cold, with a heavy snowfall. It was really palatial in comparison to quarters we were compelled to occupy later on, which were anything but clean, and where, for lack of warmth, Alice was many a time compelled to spend all day in bed—and that a bed hardly worthy of the name, made up usually upon the hard boards of the floor.

Yet we fared better than most. Now and then I had the opportunity of seeing the quarters occupied by refugees belonging to the various "missions," and I had good reason to be thankful for our particular attic. They were usually herded together in large numbers in a bare room, often without beds, fire, or light.

It used to be rather a joke with the Staff to envy us our rooms. They would come and gaze round with wide-eyed amazement, not wholly satirical. When you are sleeping on the floor yourself with only a military overcoat to wrap yourself in, or perhaps without a roof over your head at all, anything better must appear luxurious in comparison. I must admit that on several occasions it was the Staff we had to thank for our comfort. They were invariably kind and thoughtful where we were concerned.

One of the first things we did at Prishtina was to try to purchase a stock of portable food commodities, in view of eventual necessity. But there was nothing to be had in that line—nothing whatever. It had all been bought up by our predecessors. Yet we were never afraid

of asking, even in the most unlikely looking shops. The word "shop," by the way, must not be understood in the literal English sense; in these Turkish-Albanian towns the Eastern "bazaar" still persists in the main.

It was always the same sort of Ollendorfian conversation: "Have you got coffee, tea, sugar, biscuits, sardines, chocolate?" The answer was invariably "nema," which means "none"—often with "nishta" appended, and that means "none at all."

I could manage to ask for what I wanted in a Serbian shop or hotel, but that is about all. The language is very difficult to acquire, and in Serbia you will not find the native, as in France or Italy, anxious to help you out, doing his utmost to understand your halting efforts. It is not lack of politeness; he is unaccustomed to hear his language spoken by a foreigner, and his ear will not lend itself to a faulty accent. As far as he is concerned, you might still be talking your own language, even when you fancy you have expressed yourself quite nicely in Serbian.

There are a few words, however, which every one is bound to acquire. Of these the most useful is "dobro"—"good." It can be used at all times and seasons and may be made to mean quite a lot. It is really the neuter form; the masculine is "dobar," the feminine "dobra." But do not think that that is all its inflexion; every adjective has seven cases, singular and plural, so by the time your word for "good" has

reached the plural instrumental you will be disposed to think it has altogether gone to the bad.

You will have to realize, too, that in Serbia things are not at all what they seem. Thus a B is never really a B, it is a V. Similarly, H is N, and P is R. It is more difficult to remember this than to master the half-dozen extra letters which are altogether strange.

Of course we did not always come away empty-handed from our shopping expeditions, but our purchases, especially when food began to be really scarce, were often of the weirdest description. I have walked home carrying a string of Spanish onions in one hand and a bottle of Greek brandy in the other—great finds, both of them.

Saluting under these conditions was difficult, but every one was in the same boat. When I first received my commission it was impressed on me most forcibly that a Serbian officer must never—never—under any circumstances—carry a parcel, and it used to be a great amusement in those days to impress this fact upon my wife and allow her to do the carrying, by way of a change. Nobody anticipated then the conditions that would prevail a few months later.

As for Alice herself, her great trouble in the latter part of the retreat was her inability to purchase hairpins. Even in Scutari these very necessary adjuncts of feminine toilet were apparently quite unobtainable. (I say *were*, for

we are no longer at Scutari as I write these things; it is two or three days now since we came to Liesh.)

We knew very little of the actual military situation while we were at Prishtina. Captain Gwozditch, who usually kept us as well informed as he might, was not there—he had been dispatched upon one of his dangerous missions. But we were hardly allowed to take a sanguine view even had we been disposed to do so. Everybody seemed impressed with the necessity for rapid flight. I remember that we were warned three times in one morning that it was almost as much as our lives were worth to stay on more than a day or two longer. A certain major, who was a great friend of ours and knew what he was talking about, was particularly emphatic: "Voyagez, voyagez, et continuez de voyager!" he advised; and Dr. Givandinovitch, who had escaped from Skoplje, gave the same advice.

The doctor was very kind to us in those days. It was now very difficult to get reasonable food, and he arranged for us to join a certain *ménage*; Selam, who had been left behind by his master, used to bring us the dishes, hot, twice a day, so we did not do so badly.

The actual position may be summed up in a few words. The "Quartier Général" had appreciated the fact that practical assistance would not be forthcoming, and that the only course was to accelerate the retreat so as to save as much of the army as possible. It was upon

that, and upon the transport of food—now of vital importance—that every energy had to be expended.

The three Serbian armies were drawing together on the plain of Kossovo. There were anxious days when everybody wondered if they would come safely through or whether the Bulgars would force their way to Kossovo first. It seemed only too likely that those divisions which had been holding the passes of Ibar and Kopavnik might be cut off. Luckily this was not the case, and the junction of the armies was effectively accomplished.

King Peter was often himself upon the battlefield in those days—his own weakness and suffering disregarded in his intense anxiety for his "children," as he called his troops. By the law of the land he had the right to command—in the army as elsewhere—but he never arrogated this privilege to himself: he left Voyvoda Putnik in complete control; he was contented for his own part to stimulate and encourage his men by his constant presence among them; and his men responded with genuine enthusiasm and love. He was constantly in the firing-line, utterly devoid of physical fear, and it is true that he has passed directly from a bed of sickness to the trenches, feeling that he was needed, utterly unable to rest while the fate of his army—his country—hung in the balance.

I have luckily been able to secure one or two good snapshots of King Peter on the battlefield

near Prishtina. They were taken at a poignant moment too. The battle appeared to be going in favour of the Serbs—but there were other considerations which rendered it impossible to push the apparent advantage. The necessity of retreat was pointed out to the King. His suffering, I am told, was painful to witness. He stretched out his arms to his troops.

"My children — my children!" he cried brokenly. "Would that I could give my life for you! If it should but stem the tide, how gladly would I die!"

One recalls the legend—I have mentioned it elsewhere—of Tsar Lazar's choice at Gratchaniza, before the battle of Kossovo. He chose the heavenly crown in preference to the earthly one that victory would give. I am quite sure that King Peter, in his intense love for his people, would have laid down, for their sake, not only his earthly, but his heavenly crown as well.

And it was upon the plain of Kossovo, at no great distance from the spot where Tsar Lazar perished, that King Peter, in agony of spirit, saw his army fall back.

Prishtina is a town of considerable interest, though not ancient. It marks the farthest point eastward to which the Albanians pushed in their penetration—I can hardly use the word "peaceful"—of what was then Turkish territory. At Prishtina you are in one of the "New" Serbian provinces, but to judge from the population you might just as well be in Albania. The same



KING PETER AT LABIJAN, NEAR PRISHTINA

remark applies to Prizren, Jacova, and Petch (the two latter now in Montenegro), and in fact to the whole of the Sandjak and Kossovo districts. And, be it noted, the Albanians of this district do not love the Serbs.

I have already had plenty to say about the great plain of Kossovo, of such supreme value to the Serbs; also of the wedding that we witnessed at the church of Gratchaniza under such happy circumstances half a dozen months earlier. That wedding party was vividly recalled to my mind one day at Prishtina.

I had made a small purchase in a local shop, and was much surprised to hear myself addressed by name.

"How on earth do you know me?" I inquired.

The explanation was soon given. My friend had been fulfilling some important duty on the occasion of that wedding. He remembered me, and knew my name because there had been a long account in the paper of our presence there, and how Alice had presented the bride with an antique pin taken from her own hair. He recalled all these things to my mind, smiling sadly.

Of course I asked after the happy couple. Had they made good their escape? My informant shook his head: no, it was not possible —there was the little woman to be thought of— she was not well—it was very sad, for there was going to be danger at Prishtina—great danger. He glanced at me significantly as he spoke.

He would hear nothing of my suggestion that a stand might still be possible now that the three Serbian armies had joined forces. Besides, it wasn't only the Bulgars and the Germans that were to be feared. It was a more intimate danger than that—a rising of the Arnaut population.

No doubt he was right. What happened when Prishtina fell, a week later, I cannot say. There were massacres by the Albanians in other places undoubtedly. But I trust all was well with our friends, the bridegroom of Gratchaniza and his pretty little bride at whose wedding we had danced so gaily while Serbia was Serbia still.

It was rather against our will—since it meant detaching ourselves from the Army Staff—that we yielded at last to the strong solicitations of our friends that we should leave Prishtina. A promise was given us, however, that we should be kept informed as to the movements of the Staff, who in all probability would follow us to Prizren in a few days' time. So we accepted the offer of places in a car that was carrying some officers to Prizren, and we set out early one morning when the snow was still lying heavy on the ground.

And now for the first time we saw what was to become a familiar sight. The road was strewn with the bodies of dead oxen, dead horses—and dead men.

CHAPTER X

PRIZREN

We were lucky to find places in that car, for a great number of refugees had to trudge the whole weary way on foot. I met many at Prizren who had done so—weak women and girls among them—and it was not as if the sad pilgrimage had its end at Prizren; it was, indeed, only the beginning.

Some may have realized this at the time. We certainly did not. We were absolutely vague as to what our next move would be. Of course there had been plenty of talk of retreating to the sea by way of Montenegro, or Albania, or southwards through Monastir to Salonika; but for ourselves we would not abandon hope of an eventual change of conditions; and we were possessed of a conviction, utterly without foundation, that once the Serbian army had been swept completely out of the country the Germans and the Bulgars would rest upon their laurels and pursue no farther. I had consulted a map and decided that Jacova, just over the border of Montenegro, would suit admirably for headquarters until the happy day of relief set in, so Prizren being on the way to Jacova, we were

not doing amiss by going there. But in any case, advance or retreat, we had no desire to fly back home in a hurry as the various "missions" were doing; we were in the thick of a tremendous episode, and, whether for good or ill, we wished to see it out.

That my idea of safety over the border was not altogether fatuous is proved by the selection of Scutari by the "Quartier Général" as the goal of retreat, the spot where the army, should it escape, might rest and undergo reconstruction. However, as I have said, we went to Prizren without knowing in the least what we should do next. Also, possessing no books whatever, we were marvellously ignorant of the country to which fate had brought us. Luckily we were in constant touch with better informed people.

Under the snow the great plain of Kossovo looked very black and repellent when we traversed it on our way to Prizren. In the summer I believe it is a glorious field of wild flowers; but the Turks never cultivated it much; and it is quite capable of cultivation. The railway between Skoplje and Mitrovitza traverses it, and trains were still running between the latter place and Ferizovitch while we were at Prishtina; it was the only bit of railway left to the country, except, to be accurate, the small stretch of line that crosses the Greek frontier to Monastir; since Monastir had not yet fallen, this must still have been open.

If it had not been rather a job to get to the

Prishtina railway station—it is some seven or eight miles from the town—I should have run over to Mitrovitza to inquire after the unit which I heard was, or had been, there. Probably it was "had been," since the town was already rather severely threatened by the Germans.

The road to Prizren runs south as far as Stimlja, which has a station on the line, from which, like Prishtina, it is several miles away. Then it turns west, and soon plunges into a very wild region, traversing outlying spurs of the Shar Mountains. For Serbia it is a remarkably good road, or, considering the amount of snow that had fallen, we should probably have met with many difficulties. Had we been in the mood to enjoy scenery, the drive would have been most pleasantly memorable, for every turn of the road unfolds some new aspect, while the view from the summit of the pass is wonderful; but how could one think of these things when every turn had also some new horror in store? Our hearts were not yet hardened to these minor tragedies of war.

Mount Luboten, far away in the distance, snow-clad, glowing red in the setting sun, seemed to greet us as an old friend, reminiscent of happy days at Skoplje; but it was only for a few minutes that the great mountain remained in sight.

As usual, having left Prishtina in a great hurry, we were ill supplied with food. I fancy we had two small tins of preserve of some sort, but no bread at all. So when one of our travelling companions kindly presented us with the half of

his loaf, we were so delighted that we immediately offered him one of our tins in exchange. Politeness moved him to accept it—politeness alone, for he had other things, and only put it aside—but the result was that we were very faint and hungry when, about eight o'clock, we reached Prizren. All the same, I cannot say that for a moment we grudged the preserve we had given away; only those who find themselves deprived of bread understand how much they need it.

Prizren appeared a weird and uncanny spot when we entered it that night, driving through a maze of narrow streets which our car could only negotiate with difficulty. Snow still lay on the houses, and a moon that was nearly full made everything look ghastly and white. There was hardly a soul about, for Turkish habits prevail at Prizren, and people shut themselves up in their houses after sunset. It seemed just the place where one would expect to meet adventure—a sort of goblin town on the very uttermost fringe of the world.

The car dropped us in one of the narrow streets; it had reached an impasse, and simply could not go on. Our obvious course then seemed to be to find our way to an hotel; but it was not an easy job. Our companions had drifted away, leaving us there with rather more baggage than we could carry ourselves, and with no one to help us. We were beginning to feel distinctly depressed when, by good fortune, a policeman hove in sight.

He was very civil, but gave us to understand that it was extremely doubtful whether we could find a room that night, as the town was crowded to overflowing, which seemed strange considering its deserted appearance. However, he spent about an hour with us, trying house after house, but no one was ready to take us in; in fact, very few could be induced to answer at all to his persistent knocking at the door. Finally he conducted us to the " hotel "—save the mark !—and here he left us to look after ourselves.

That hotel! The only common-room was at the head of a flight of stairs, actually a broad landing on which the bedrooms opened, and at night it was given over as a sort of dormitory to soldiers and refugees. They lay on the floor where and how they pleased—a few had found the tables a better sleeping-place—some still sat drinking. A reasonable wine was procurable, by the way, when we first reached Prizren, but it soon gave out.

They found us room at one of the filthy tables, and brought us some soup, which we needed badly. It was all there was to be had. Lodging the hotel could not provide, so we must await the success of an emissary, a ragged porter whom we had sent out to continue the search. Meanwhile I had met some French acquaintances who told me that if the worst came to the worst we could put up at the fever hospital; there were a lot of refugees there, and clean straw to sleep on.

It did not sound inviting, and we were relieved when our messenger returned with a big, fierce-looking Turk who declared that he had an apartment to offer us. We accompanied the two men meekly, for we were tired out. "Is it near here?" was all I asked, and I was told it was.

It was not. We walked on and on through endless tortuous streets, each one seemingly more dark and menacing than the one before it, and at last, recognizing that we were coming to a distinctly ominous-looking quarter, I decided that it was time to call a halt. Our guides might be honest, but, on the other hand, they might not. Who could say that their object might not be to inveigle us into some trap, where, alone as we were, we might be robbed and murdered without any one being the wiser?

I allowed them to see that I was armed. I had already learnt the necessity of carrying a revolver—the more conspicuously the better.

I ordered the men to conduct us back to the central part of the town. We would go to the fever hospital. There, at any rate, we should be safe. They protested volubly, but had to obey, so back we went.

Then they declared they did not know where the fever hospital was. We searched for it for the best part of half an hour, until we were nearly ready to drop with fatigue. And I do not know what we should have done in the end had it not been that just as we were getting

desperate, two forms loomed out of the shadow of the deserted street, and when they drew near I recognized one of them as a friend. It was General Popovitch, our old friend of Skoplje days.

To him we told our tale of woe, and he at once took the matter in hand. Another policeman was requisitioned, a more important functionary this time, who conducted us straight to the first of the houses at which we had made fruitless application earlier in the evening. We mentioned this fact, but the policeman smiled—he knew better.

But it was only after repeated ringing that the door was opened—very gingerly—and then a decided negative answer was given to our request. There was no unoccupied room in the house.

However, the inspector was not content. This was one of the houses that had been requisitioned to supply accommodation, and he wished to satisfy himself that he was being told the truth. He forced his way in, leaving us outside.

And presently there was a great to-do. A sound of crying and lamentation went up, and out rushed a small man and a large woman, and the latter threw herself upon the neck of each of us in turn. I shall never forget the picture of the very solemn general as he disengaged himself from her clasp—it was only to be clutched again as she dropped on her knees before him.

It appeared that there was a room, after all, and the little man who had sought to conceal the fact was to be haled off promptly to prison.

Hence all the tears and supplications. For a long while the general and the inspector were adamant—I think for form's sake—but at last they yielded, and the offender was forgiven. We were conducted to the room, which was essentially Turkish in its lack of all the ordinary requirements of a bedroom; but we were not disposed to quarrel with anything so long as we could lie down and go to sleep, even though it had to be upon the floor. We remained there for four nights, and our hosts were civil enough—but how they must have hated us in their hearts!

Poor General Popovitch, he looked ill and worn, and, indeed, he had suffered much. I have heard that he was officially blamed for the fall of Skoplje, but I doubt if it is true, for he can hardly have been held responsible for the poverty of the troops that were left to defend the city; and it was for that reason that Skoplje fell—a secondary reason, the primary one being that it was not anticipated that Skoplje, on the main Salonika–Nish line, would be left unprotected by the Allies. It was Serbia's strategy to defend herself with her full strength on the north and east—even there she was outnumbered by three to one—since she calculated upon efficient assistance from the English and French in the south. Acting upon this assumption, Skoplje had only been held by raw, inadequate, and unreliable troops; one regiment, recruited in Macedonia, went bodily over to the enemy. Such is the case as it has been represented to me.

Be all this as it may, it is not difficult to understand that General Popovitch as we met him at Prizren was a changed man from him whom we knew, only a few months ago, at Skoplje.

Prizren by day bore a very different aspect to Prizren by night. The narrow tortuous streets were thronged to a point of actual discomfort; if a cart should happen to come along, one was invariably wedged in the thick of a crowd of pushing people. And it was all so drab!

I can quite imagine any one who may have seen Prizren at a more normal season—there cannot be a large number who have!—protesting loudly at this expression; but it is true of Prizren as we knew it. The colour of a town is largely due to the people who throng its streets, and I imagine that at ordinary times Prizren would easily vie with Salonika or Skoplje in this respect; but not while we were there. One missed altogether the picturesque element of national dress. I do not know what had become of the native population; no doubt they were there just the same, but literally eclipsed by the masses of Serbian soldiers who thronged the streets, their uniforms already worn and ragged—drab; even the officers had lost their smartness. What else could one expect? They lent no colour to the street. And there were so many civilians too, people of all classes, humble refugees from Nish and Belgrade and men of wealth and position; but all alike they bore signs of weariness and depression—they too were drab. Hardly a woman was to be

seen; the few one met were not natives, but refugee nurses of the various "missions" who had not yet been able to obtain transport—they did not add to the brightness of the scene. It was as if one had taken a fantastic dream-world setting and peopled it from barrack, hospital, and gutter. It was a ghastly combination, all the more so when one realized that which was as yet only faintly apparent—the gathering shadow of famine. The faces of the men were not yet in harmony with their clothing—they could still smile—the silence of despair had not set their lips; but, looking at them as they paraded the streets or haggled here and there with some perambulating huckster—generally for food—one felt instinctively the presence of an unseen but dreaded terror, some hideous shape that was gathering strength to materialize.

That is Prizren as we saw it. Normally it is a town essentially of Turkish fashion, and quite remarkable for its beauty of site. Its chief inhabitants are Moslem Albanians and Moslem Serbs. The womenkind of this persuasion, here and elsewhere, do not drape their faces, but in other respects affect Turkish garb. Our landlady was a good example; her broad, floppy trousers were a marvellous production. Nor do these women conceal themselves from man's gaze; they have adopted the Moslem faith very freely and according to their own ideals. The Serbian women are not so keen on the trousers—they prefer the orthodox apron of bright colours, but



SERBIAN MAHOMEDAN WOMEN AT PRIZREN

beneath it they wear garments of such thick material that it produces an unsightly—not to say suggestive—abdominal protuberance. Ordinary underclothing, save for the woollen stockings, is not affected at all.

The native Albanians resent bitterly the Serbian occupation of their town. Yet Prizren is a spot almost as sacred to the Serb as Skoplje or the plain of Kossovo itself, for it was once the capital and stronghold of the great Tsar Douchan, and it is bound up, like few other towns, with Serbian history real and legendary. I have no doubt that it contains remnants of the past. I have heard of Douchan's Tower, and the town slopes up, amid mountain streams and fountains, to the ruins of an ancient castle crowning a hill-top. But we had other things to think of in those days, and " sight-seeing " did not by any means enter into our daily programme.

We were separated from our Army Staff, but we met many friends at Prizren. The " Quartier Général " had arrived there, as well as most of the Government officials ; we dined once or twice at the formal *ménage*. It was far from luxurious, but immeasurably better than the wretched food with which we were provided at the " hotel," and which we could only get after waiting an hour for it.

It was over the table of the "Quartier Général" *ménage* that certain remarks were made to me by a high English official which surprised me intensely—coming from such a quarter.

"You know, of course," he said, "that the Serbs are putting up no fight at all. They won't have any newspaper correspondent at the front—and that's the reason."

I spoke of the wounded in our hospital at Pirot; I mentioned the fierce figthing at Lescovatz, Moramor, Kachenik, and elsewhere.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Some people are bound to get hurt when there is shrapnel flying about," he said.

Every man is entitled to his own opinions. Personally I think that there is ample evidence, overflowing evidence, on the Serbian side; but if a man wishes to reject obvious facts he is at liberty to do so. Is he, however, justified in accepting the hospitality, as an accredited guest, of a country with which he is so evidently out of sympathy? It is a small thing, but while I cannot forget the words I can also not forget the place where they were spoken.

I have heard of a fierce cartoon in a German paper. It represented the Allies in a small boat on a stormy sea. Serbia is a drowning man, about to disappear in the depths. France is in the act of throwing him a lifebelt, but England interferes. "No," says John Bull, "we may want that for ourselves. Throw him the laurel wreath."

I commend this little story to my friend, who, perhaps, was anxious to find some excuse for the failure of the British Government to fulfil its promised word. Only he could not even afford to throw the laurels!

We heard, soon after reaching Prizren, that the First British Field Hospital had passed through the town a day or two before we arrived. They had made a long halt at Mitrovitza, always hoping, although they no longer had any equipment except their cars, to find some useful employment. They had not retreated before it was absolutely necessary.

At Prizren Mr. Doklestitch had succeeded in setting them up with some thirty donkeys. With these they had set off for Monastir, although the main route via Tetova was no longer open. They had, as I subsequently heard, to branch off into Albania, and had a very rough time, with the Bulgars practically on their heels, before they reached their destination. Monastir fell on the very day they left it for Salonika.

The cars remained behind with Mr. Doklestitch, whom we met afterwards with them—the few that were left—on the road to Petch. They had been placed at the disposition of the Serbian authorities, and no doubt they met with the same fate as all the others when it became impossible to make further use of them.

One member of the unit turned up at Prizren all by himself. This was Mr. Drew, who had stayed behind at Krushervatz with the stores. He had only got away by the skin of his teeth after the Germans had begun to bombard the town, and he had walked nearly the whole distance, having attached himself to another "mission" —a tramp of many weary days. He was very keen

on getting home, but the road to Monastir was no longer practicable by now, so he decided to wait and see what we were going to do.

A great many people were buying horses; there was a regular market near the hotel; but they were poor brutes, and high prices were being asked for them; it would be a different matter when one had crossed the mountains and wished to resell.

According to my notes, it was about this time —November 20—that the French were repulsed at Krivolak, where they had done well earlier in the month, and, with the English, evacuated the country altogether.

Now that the road to Monastir was closed only two routes remained for the fugitives, army and civilian, who wished to escape from the country. And as far as the army was concerned it had been definitely decided by those in authority that further resistance was useless, that surrender was out of the question, and that nothing remained but to push on to Scutari, where there was some prospect of being left in peace. Of the two routes to this city, one lay direct across Albania, following the course of the Drin, the other by way of Petch through Montenegro.

A large proportion of the army went by the first route. It was the shorter of the two, but undoubtedly the more difficult and dangerous. There was no regular path, and it was necessary to depend upon Albanian guides who, time after time, wilfully led astray—or if they did not do

this they would come to a halt in some desert spot and refuse to advance another step unless paid a heavy bribe—and the unfortunate Serbs were helpless—to stay where they were was to starve. Of the treatment which the Serbs received at the hands of the Arnauts generally I shall have more to say later on.

The King went this way, and so did the Voyvoda Putnik. The two old men were carried in litters over the most difficult points of the road.

As for ourselves, receiving no news of the Staff at the end of three or four days, we contemplated a return to Prishtina, and although we were warned that such a journey could only be undertaken in face of grave danger, we arranged to go and return in a motor-car that was being dispatched to fetch some wounded officers. Very luckily for us, as we were on our way to join the car, we met a friend, a M. Brabatz, head chauffeur to the Second Army, who had a letter for us, and who had been searching for us all over Prizren. Had we missed him and returned to Prishtina, we should no doubt have delivered ourselves into the hands of the enemy.

The Second Army was going to Petch (Ipek) by a more direct road—a very dangerous one, owing to fierce Albanian tribes—and would not touch Prizren. M. Brabatz, however, was in charge of four new motor-cars belonging to the army—they had cost upwards of £1000 apiece just before the war with Bulgaria broke out—and

the only possible way to get them to Petch was by way of Prizren and Jacova. It was very doubtful if he could do this, as the road was terrible, and there were broken bridges to be negotiated. His instructions were, however, to take us along in one of the cars.

Of course we accepted gratefully, and that evening we reached Jacova, which is just across the frontier of Montenegro. And here, finding everything different to what it was at Prizren, we fondly imagined that, having entered another country, the conditions all round would be changed for the better. We found a nice café with a clean cloth to the table—oh, luxury!—reasonable food, open shops with things to sell, and we were hospitably entertained in a Turkish house, our hostesses refusing to take any remuneration whatever. True, we slept on the floor and "five in a bed"—it was spread out over the whole breadth of the room; but we were in the mood to regard this as rather funny—by no means anything to worry about.

But all this was only because as yet Jacova had not been affected by the retreat, not lying upon the main route taken by the army. Only a few days later the Arnauts were in arms, and helpless civilians were murdered in the streets of the town. Jacova was living up to its name—which means "Full of Blood."

CHAPTER XI

PETCH

THERE were some eight or nine of us travelling in those four cars. Mr. Drew was of the party, and we had two other friends, a lady and her daughter, the latter being engaged to a young officer with whom we were very well acquainted. He had been an Austrian subject, but, by birth a Serb, had escaped to his own country. He had parted with his fiancée at Prizren, as he had to march with his regiment.

Our drive from Jacova to Petch was attended by many not altogether unexpected difficulties. We had got away quite early in the morning, and were possessed of a fond and foolish belief that we should reach our destination before dark. We had no food with us except a little dry bread.

We had not reckoned sufficiently upon the state of the road. It was a glorious day, but very cold; yet the frost of the night had not been sufficient to dry up the mud. It was too marshy. There were places into which the wheels of our cars sank deep, and it took us all our time to extricate them. And it wrung our hearts to see the wretched horses ploughing through that

mud—there were some that plunged in till they could not be extricated. One saw them struggling helplessly, sinking deeper and deeper. It was a charity to shoot them then and there, but this was rarely done—the ammunition could not be spared.

We passed several groups of Austrian prisoners that day. The unfortunate men were starving, and begged for food—and we had none to give. There were some by the roadside who had thrown themselves upon a dead horse and were cutting it up for food. I saw no hint of a fire for cooking the meat.

In the course of the afternoon we came to a bridge that had broken down, and a large gang of Albanians was busy with its repair. Of course they crowded round us, chattering and giving advice, and a weirder sight than they presented in the gathering dusk of a November afternoon it would be difficult to imagine.

If you can fancy yourself suddenly surrounded by a mob of gibbering pantomime clowns, ghostly in their white dresses, you will have some idea of the picture as it presented itself to us. Nor was it difficult, though the men were doing their best to be helpful, to imagine an irresponsible clownish spirit of mischief that might at any moment break out into something sinister and menacing.

The Albanian's resemblance to a clown arises from the fact that his dress is essentially white, curiously embroidered in black, embroidery that

easily suggests the fantastic designs upon the clown's costume. The trousers fit tightly, and do not appear to be carried higher than the hips, so that they always look as if they were slipping off. They are attached by a broad sash which usually carries a good supply of cartridges and weapons of offence. The shirt is of white flannel and is but slightly concealed by the embroidered "bolero" waistcoat that is worn over it. The head is invariably covered by a tight-fitting cap of white felt. This cap is as essential to the Albanian as the fez to the Turk.

The hair is often fantastically dressed. A fashion very commonly observed is to shave the head, except for a tuft upon the crown which is allowed to grow long and is worn something after the manner of a short pigtail.

Different tribes may have different manners of dress, just as certain ones are far more civilized and better regulated than others. The wildest and fiercest inhabit the country along the River Drenitza, which is between Ipek and Prishtina, on Serbian territory.

Knowing little at that time of the "Arnauts," as they are called in Serbia, we were inclined to regard our party of clowns as helpful, good-natured fellows, and certainly they lent us every assistance in their power in pushing our cars through the mud and up the steep slope of the river-bed; but we were quickly undeceived by M. Brabatz.

"It's a good thing for us that we are all

together," he said, " and also that there are so many other people on the road. These fellows would ask nothing better than to cut our throats if they got the chance."

It was probably true. Apart from the instinct of brigandage, the Albanian hates the Serb. It is a racial hatred, and dates from the days, many hundreds of years ago, when the Slavs came pouring into the Balkans from the north and dispossessed of their own the original inhabitants, from whom the modern Albanians are descended.

M. Brabatz was very eager that we should get safely to Petch that night. There were several ladies in the party, and he, at least, was fully aware of the dangers of the country.

But fate was against us. Excellent as were our cars, they were unequal to the difficulties of the road. Before nightfall we had stuck hopelessly in the mud, and not even a team of oxen, commandeered from passing carts, could extricate us.

There was a village close at hand, and we fondly imagined that we could find shelter there for the night. But M. Brabatz looked doubtful.

" It is an Arnaut village," he said. " However, we will call upon the head man and see if he is disposed to be amiable. Perhaps he will give us the ' bessa.' "

This was a new word to us, and we inquired its meaning. M. Brabatz explained. If an Albanian consents to give you the " bessa " you may regard yourself as quite safe with him. It

would be an unthinkable infringement of an unwritten law if, having granted the "bessa" or permitted it to be granted, he did you an injury himself or allowed you to be injured by others while under his roof.

A primitive custom, but these wild Albanian tribesmen have their own codes of honour, and they observe them most scrupulously. If, for instance, you should offend a man who happens to be your host he will not retaliate as long as he still regards you as his guest; he will wait till you have left his house, and then he feels himself quite justified if he follows and murders you.

One might recall many queer customs which still hold good in this out-of-the-way part of the world, some, like the foregoing, suggestive of the Far East, others that carry your mind back to mediæval days.

Admire an object belonging to an Arnaut. "It is yours," he will say promptly, and, unlike the Spaniard, who often makes use of a similar phrase, he means what he says.

A friend of ours once found himself in a predicament owing to his ignorance of this habit. Guest in an Albanian house, he admired his host's gold watch. It was immediately pressed upon him, and he found himself obliged to accept it. Feeling that he must give something in return, he could find nothing suitable except his revolver. So the end of it was that he parted with an article that he could ill spare in exchange for one that he had no real need of.

We did not find the head man of the village hospitable. He expressed himself unwilling to recommend us houses where we could rest in peace and security. So there was nothing for it but to spend the night in the cars. The cold was so intense that sleep was out of the question—we had constantly to be jumping out to warm hands and feet at the fire that the chauffeurs had kindled close to the cars. But uncomfortable as this was, it was no doubt all for the best, since we were warned that it was advisable to keep a sharp look out and to have our revolvers ready to hand.

The advice was good. It was about midnight when we perceived some half-dozen Arnauts creeping stealthily towards us across the fields. They did not come together, but in a line, and with about a dozen yards between any two, and they took cover when they could behind the low stunted trees that grew along the ditches. There was a full moon and hard frost, and the clown-like figures looked more than ever weird and ghostly in the white cold light with which everything was flooded.

Our chauffeur, with his gun, was down in a minute, and as for ourselves, our fingers tightened upon our revolvers. But there was no need for them. The Arnauts, after a moment's pause, passed on as if they were absolutely innocent of any fell design. And presently M. Brabatz came up, rubbing his hands.

"A scouting party," he explained. "But I

don't think they'll trouble us any more. I've taken them in nicely."

He swept his hand round, pointing to a number of fires that were burning at different points in the neighbourhood. "What do you make of those fires?" he inquired.

"Other people's camps," was our very natural reply. We had already thanked our stars for those camps, as we concluded that the Arnauts, seeing them, had deemed the party too strong to be attacked.

"That's where you are mistaken," was M. Brabatz's reply. "There are no camps anywhere near except our own. All the fires you see were lit by my men—just to give the impression that apparently they have succeeded in giving—just to cheat our friends the Arnauts."

It was a worthy effort on the part of M. Brabatz, and he was awarded a vote of thanks by the whole of our little party.

The frost aiding us by hardening the ground, we got off at about two o'clock, and reached Petch as dawn was breaking. It was bitingly cold, and the moon was still shining brightly. The empty market-place, where we drew up the cars, looked peaceful and wonderfully picturesque, with the houses all white with frost and moonlight and the great snow mountains towering in front. And we had leisure to enjoy the scene, for it was a full hour before we could obtain access to either of the so-called hotels. Luckily, for we were very cold and hungry, having had

practically nothing to eat since breakfast the day before, we came across a Turk who was selling cups of salep to early risers, a hot, aromatic-tasting drink that has a powder called "iciote" sprinkled over it. What the actual ingredients may be we have never attempted to decide, but certainly that morning we owed a debt of gratitude to salep.

When the hotels actually opened there was no food to be had, only coffee and "rakia." And later, when a few of the shops opened—very warily, for they knew the Serbian army was coming, and were afraid—there was little enough that could be purchased. Luckily one of our party was able to produce some bread, which went down very well with "karmak," the native cheese.

We secured a room at one of the hotels. We had journeyed far since the retreat began, and stayed in one or two strange places, but we had not yet been compelled to accept an apartment half as dirty or as miserable. We were told, however, that we might take it or leave it, and later on, when we came to realize the condition of the town, we were glad that sheer fatigue had prompted us to stay.

Oh, the dirt of that squalid room! Not once during the ten days that we occupied it did we venture to sleep beneath the bed coverings, while we had always to wrap something about our heads before we dared make use of the pillows. Yet we could not have found better quarters in

the town, overcrowded as it was, for love or money, and there were many who envied us the luxury of having a room to ourselves.

"Comme c'est chic chez vous!" said M. Brabatz, when he first came to see us after we were installed. Absurd as it sounded, the remark was not exactly meant to be ironical, for he himself was sharing a tiny room with half a dozen others, while as for the Staff, when they arrived, most of them had to be contented with the floor.

We soon got accustomed to it, and, indeed, the room was luxurious in comparison to many which it was our fate to occupy later on. Yet we acquired quite a reputation for being lucky in finding accommodation superior to that obtainable by others.

Things were not really so bad when one got used to them, and we improved the look of our room as well as we could by purchasing a mat for the dirty floor, a couple of cheap rugs for the beds—it was really wiser, and they might come in useful afterwards—and a bright-coloured cloth for the bare table. Washstand, or anything of that sort, we did not possess. It is a luxury that you must not look for even in quite nicely furnished houses. You are expected to wash outside, and you are lucky if there is more than one basin for the whole household. At one or two places we stopped at—they were little more than hovels, certainly—when we asked for water for washing purposes we were met by stares of

blank amazement; finally the water was brought —in a tumbler. And we had to make it do.

In many houses—Turkish, or where Turkish habits prevail—they will not let you wash your hands for yourself. Your hostess will consider it her duty to bring basin and ewer, and she will pour the water over your hands while you rinse them, and for politeness' sake you have to pretend to be quite satisfied.

We did not only sleep in that room at Petch; we had our meals, entertained our friends, and spent the greater part of the day there. At first we had dinner and supper in the one public room, but this very soon became impossible. The gradual deterioration of that hotel café might present a series of pictures fascinating in their very horror to the imaginative mind.

At first all was conducted with order and precision. The room was small; it contained only some four or five tables at which one sat upon long wooden forms. There was no attempt at napery, which perhaps was as well. But the table d'hôte, such as it was, was evidently an old-established institution; the same clients came to it every day; if there was not room for all, the late-comers had to wait. The service was of the simplest, but it sufficed. The landlord knew what he had to provide, and he went about his daily work in placid content of spirit.

Then the crowd of refugees poured into Petch, and the town soon felt the strain. Food prices went up, and the table d'hôte could no longer be

maintained at its former level. The café was filled all day to overflowing; people struggled for seats at the tables when meal-times came; the demand for food exceeded by far the possibilities of which the hotel was capable. Respectable clients stayed away. The landlord was in despair.

And then, with the influx of the army, things became ever so much worse. It was no longer possible to serve a meal at all. The table d'hôte was given up, and nothing was sold but wine, coffee, and "rakia." There was no drunkenness or disturbance, for that is not the way of the Serb, but the restaurant was a restaurant no more—it was a rest-house for weary soldiers and refugees.

As for ourselves, we could no longer take our meals downstairs; there was no room for us. The refugees sat there wearily amid their belongings scattered haphazard about the room. Some scarcely moved during the whole of the long, dragging day, and when night came they stretched themselves out on the floor and slept. They were all hungry, but there was no food, nothing but "rakia," for which they had no appetite. There was no complaining, and very little noise; only now and then a child would whimper pitifully.

We had difficulty in getting food in those days. The much-worried cook refused to do any further work, and it was a daily task for our orderly—we had got one by now, a Montenegrin and a plausible rogue—to persuade her to make an exception in our favour. One could only reach

the kitchen through the restaurant, and at last the landlord, to prevent incursions by the soldiers and refugees, blocked the way altogether.

Then we had to cater for ourselves and get our meat cooked at some other house in the neighbourhood. It was not easy at all, especially as prices were going up terribly and the shops had practically nothing to sell. We can recall a day when our chief meal consisted of baked apples. We cooked them ourselves upon our little stove. But even apples, abundant at first, soon became hard to find. We paid eight francs a kilo for the last lot we bought—about as many small apples. As for bread, it was eight to ten francs a loaf.

Our little stove was a source of trouble too. It was necessary to keep it going, for the cold was at times intense, but wood was very hard to get, and the prices one paid for it exorbitant. When we did get it it was usually so damp that we had to spend all our time blowing it into reluctant flame—I never saw such a thing as a pair of bellows during all our wanderings. As for our orderly, whose name was Chirovitch—naturally shortened by us to "Cheer-oh!"—he belied his name, for day by day he would come to us with tales of impending disaster if we did not take to flight immediately. The least that could happen to us was that we should all be massacred in our beds.

And night after night the sky was red with ominous flame. All manner of property was

being destroyed lest it should fall into the hands of the advancing Bulgars. Mitrovitza had fallen on the 26th, Prishtina on the 27th—on the 30th the Bulgars were already at Jacova; they were closing in upon us from every side. An Arnaut rising was reported from a mountain village along the route that we should have to take in our further flight.

Towards the end the unfortunate hotel took another step on its downward career. There was a great disturbance one day—the sound of much shouting in the courtyard and in the street. We soon learnt the reason.

An excited gentleman, armed, however, with power from the military authorities, had turned up and proposed to requisition the whole of the hotel for a hospital. He had come, with a number of wounded men, from Prizren, and he had searched Petch in vain for any place to lodge them. And, indeed, it seemed almost futile to have undertaken the painful journey at all, for how was it to be continued? Sorely wounded men could not face the path across the mountains.

The landlord did not approve of this transformation of his hotel, and protested loudly in voluble Albanian. But of course he was powerless, as, too, were the unfortunate refugees who saw themselves deprived of their shelter. One by one they drifted out into the cold street, still silent and resigned, wandering forth to God knows what fate. Those were the days of the heavy snow and intense cold, when the mountain

path was reported so dangerous that it was folly to risk one's life upon it. There were terrible stories circulating in the town.

And then the patients arrived. The common-room—the restaurant that a little while ago had been the daily resort of a genial, if unrefined, clientèle—was prepared for their reception. It was a simple task, consisting merely in the removal of tables and benches, and the laying down of straw. A Red Cross flag was suspended over the door. This was the new hospital.

And soon, as was only to be expected, it became an abode of horror. The wounded men lay huddled together, and there were no comforts for them, no means of alleviating their suffering, little, if anything, in the way of medicaments and bandages. Cleanliness was out of the question —the unfortunate patients still wore the clothes in which they had fallen—these were the only coverings they had. There was no lack of willing workers, but what can be done without material ? It is on occasions such as these that one stands appalled, sickened, at one's utter helplessness. How we longed for our rich hospital stores, all swept away by the enemy at Krushervatz !

Sleep was next to impossible for us for the next night or two—the little while that we remained on at Petch. The night was filled with horrid sound ; there were those who groaned the long hours away, those who muttered and talked in their delirium, one who sang.

Petch—or Ipek—is a town which, at any other

time, would have interested me vastly. One can scarcely imagine a spot more cut off from the world. It is very picturesque, too, standing as it does at the foot of the great snow-covered mountains of Montenegro, and on either bank is a turbulent stream that comes straight down from the hills. From the little bridge that crosses that stream we used to gaze up the valley along which we knew we should have to take our way—a valley that narrowed into a gorge between great threatening masses of overhanging rock—and the prospect was enough to make one shudder.

It was all the more horrifying, too, when the snowstorms came, as they did soon after we reached the town. We had already had experience of snow at Prishtina, and knew what havoc the intense cold of those days had wrought upon the retreating army. There had been already many cases of frostbite, and frostbite, with the gangrene that is bound to ensue without immediate and proper treatment, is one of the most terrible conditions imaginable. I once witnessed the amputation of three limbs from this cause alone.

It was very evident that to face the mountains while the weather continued so unfavourable would be dangerous in the extreme. And yet we knew that at any moment we might have to choose between doing so or staying where we were, which meant being taken prisoners—if one escaped the infinitely greater danger of being

massacred in the rising that was almost bound to occur when the Albanian population of the town got out of hand. It was by no means a pleasing prospect to contemplate.

Luckily for ourselves we were not compelled to set out in those days. The enemy advance was slower than was at first anticipated; we even heard that they were being thrown back from Mitrovitza. But there were many refugees who did not care to delay, and heartrending descriptions were given in the town of the sufferings that they were enduring among the mountains. The reports were brought in by those who, having gone some distance, eventually abandoned the undertaking and returned.

We heard of women and children, unable to advance another step, lying down and perishing in the snow; we heard of men and horses slipping on the treacherous precipice edge and being hurled to destruction below; we heard of attacks upon the helpless fugitives by fierce Albanian brigands; we heard of hungry wolves; we heard of people too ill to go on or to turn back, their food exhausted, craving for help that none could give them.

Some one reported how, at one of the miserable "hans," he had helped a fainting woman from her tired horse; she had her two babies with her, slung in panniers on either side of the horse; the poor little mites were both dead.

No wonder we did not regard the future hopefully in those days.

Mr. Drew did not remain with us long at Petch. He bought a horse, attached himself to a unit that was just leaving, and set out for the mountains. I heard afterwards that he got away quite safely from San Giovanni di Madua. There were a good many foreign units at Petch in the early days of our stay, and for the most part they were herded together in a huge dormitory without any comforts whatever, and without any division of the sexes. The latter, however, was a very minor point, for every one was accustomed to it by now. There was no light provided, and after dark the great room looked weird, owing to the various fragments of candle burnt by those who were lucky enough to possess them, for the feeble glimmers only seemed to make long shadows and accentuate the gloom. They had no means of cooking any food they might have, nor any table to eat it off; the ground was littered with filthy straw; the atmosphere was vile. We had carped at our room at the hotel—but never again after seeing this!

Petch, like Prizren, is an ancient town, and possesses some curious monuments, among which is a monastery—a mile or two out—which is regarded with great veneration. M. Brabatz spoke of driving us there, as it was really our duty to go and see it, but the idea never materialized. As at Prizren, circumstances did not encourage sight-seeing.

Petch possesses one attractive feature—in

common, I believe, with many Eastern towns—a very complete system of canalization. There is not a street that does not possess its running stream, from which every house is provided with an abundant water-supply by means of branching conduits. On dark nights the streets are a trifle dangerous, as these water-courses are not guarded in any way, unless they happen to be boarded over, in which case the boards are usually rotten, with great gaps in them to catch the unwary. This is a disadvantage, but the general principle is excellent, and I wonder it has never been adopted in some of our smaller English towns. I saw another town possessing the same system —Vodena, now in Greece—but here each house possesses its own primitive little water-wheel. The Turks did much amiss, but this is one of the things they did well.

It was rather pitiful to see the number of motor-cars drawn up in the market-place and to realize how valueless they were. True, it might have been possible to sell them to speculative Albanians, at ridiculous prices, but that would have meant their eventual resale to the enemy; so the cars remained in melancholy array awaiting their fate, which was to be burnt ruthlessly, since they could not be saved.

A horse, or even a donkey, was more valuable at Petch in those days than any motor-car.

One of our cars met its fate earlier than the rest. Rumours having reached Petch of Arnaut unrest at Jacova—which was now, Prizren having

fallen, threatened by the Bulgarians—our friend Captain Gwozditch was commissioned to proceed to Jacova to inquire into the matter and take energetic measures to quell the incipient trouble. One of M. Brabatz's cars was placed at his disposal for the journey.

He was lucky to get through with his life. The Arnauts had risen and slaughtered a number of Serbian transport drivers and civilians, and were threatening to sack the town.

Captain Gwozditch accomplished what he had to do, but the return journey was fraught with great peril for him—all the more so when the unfortunate car failed to negotiate the difficult passage of the stream where the bridge had broken down. He had to abandon the car, take to a horse, and ride for dear life's sake. Had he not been a splendid horseman, it is likely that he would never have seen Petch.

Knowing these things, it is not unnatural that we constantly saw—or imagined—menace on the faces of the Arnauts in the streets, and felt that the sooner we got away the better.

What actually happened to those who remained behind it is impossible at present to say. Conflicting rumours do not count for much. And therein lies one of the most poignant terrors of war.

Nearly all our friends upon the Staff had left relations behind, some at one place, some at another. And none knew—none could know—what fate had befallen them.

Perhaps the saddest case of all was that of Colonel Borissavljevitch, to whom I have already referred. His wife and daughter, after flying from Belgrade and suffering great privations, were unable to travel farther than Krushervatz; here he had to part with them, he, with his three sons, accompanying the Staff of the Second Army. At Petch, however, the youngest, a boy of fourteen, was taken ill, and it was quite impossible for him to face the mountains. Our friend was in despair. With whom could he leave the child? The hospital—so-called—at Petch was a place of horror—out of the question.

But at Petch the boy had to remain, in the care of comparative strangers. And, later on, one may guess the father's agony of mind, for before we reached Podgoritza stories leaked through of heavy fighting in the streets of Petch, and there were rumours, too, of massacres by the Arnauts.

Was it so, or was it not? Even now we do not know. But the terror of uncertainty, that is real enough; and perhaps war has no more hideous spectre.

We were glad, with a relief to which words can hardly do justice, when we received our instructions to prepare for departure. We thought that at Petch we had witnessed the limit of human endurance. I am thinking of the unfortunate men who lay in the hotel common-room beneath us. Perhaps it was as well for us that we could not see into the future—that no nightmare vision

arose to mock us with a glimpse of the hell on earth that Liesh called its hospital.

We left Petch at six one morning, after a frugal breakfast of tea, bread, and margarine. As usual we made tea for ourselves. Fresh milk we practically never saw from the time the retreat began; our substitute was Nestlé's, the sweetened for choice, taken by itself or with cocoa, and very delicious we found it. The only trouble was that we had not enough.

The margarine had been purchased at Petch and presented to us by a considerate friend. We had a big drumful—one of several left behind by some "mission" departing in a hurry—and it was a great find, for we had not tasted anything in the way of butter for many weeks. Unfortunately the drum was too big to carry with us; all we could do was to fill a moderate-sized biscuit tin.

"Never mind," said our friend M. Brabatz, who was going to accompany us on our journey; "you've got enough to last till you get to Scutari. We shall find everything we want there in abundance."

It was the prevailing sentiment—Scutari, the haven of refuge!

We were advised to carry food enough to last us to Andreavitza, four days' journey, or, preferably, to Podgoritza, as it was hardly likely that we should find much on the way. It was advice easily given, but not so easily carried out, for the simple reason that Petch could provide us with

nothing suitable whatever. So we had to depend upon our own very narrow store, accumulated by contributions which we had received from Staff rations. Luckily we reckoned that we had a sufficiency of bread.

On the outskirts of the town we came across the blazing remains of the Second Army motor-cars—the new ones in which M. Brabatz had taken such pride. So Petch was tragic to the end.

CHAPTER XII

FROM PETCH TO ANDREAVITZA

LIESH, *January* 1916

PRIZREN and Petch marked the starting-points of the most cruel phases of the great tragedy of the Serbian army. Concerning the retreat directly across Albania from Prizren I can write little, for there is little that I know; nor can I tell of those smaller detachments that made for Durazzo or for Salonika by way of Monastir. But of the flight across Montenegro I may write, for it is by that route that we ourselves have journeyed, until at last—two or three days ago—we have come here to Liesh, a fitting spot to represent the climax of a series of grim and ghastly pictures that will remain for ever stamped upon our brains.

Let it be at Liesh that I record these things. A better suited background could not be desired.

* * * * *

I have spoken of grim and ghastly pictures. Think of them. During that terrible retreat across the cold grey mountains we witnessed the slow famishing of man and beast; we watched strong men become the mere shadows of themselves; we saw despair take hold of what had

once been a valiant light-hearted army—bitter and most sombre despair. The retreat was all against the will of the Serbian soldiers, remember; they were most of them quite in the dark with regard to the political situation; they desired to be allowed to fight the enemy; they yearned to defend their country, their homes, their wives, their children, to their last breath; they failed to realize that the hordes of German, Austrian, and Bulgarian troops pouring into Serbia would simply wipe them out—that they could offer no sustained resistance, but would merely suffer annihilation. The army as a whole did not comprehend that the game was up—that no effort on their part could drive out the invaders—that they were hopelessly outnumbered; that fact must not be overlooked, nor the intensity of tragedy that it conveys. The simple peasant mind of the men could not grasp the truth. They did not understand why they must retreat before their foes, why they must starve, why they must die.

For ourselves, we shall always be thankful that we rode with the troops, for we can give the testimony of eye-witnesses as to the splendid discipline that prevailed—the sublime endurance; but it is impossible to write of some of the horrors we saw during the slow retreat across the mountains, for the martyrdom of man and beast went on daily, as soldier and horse and ox fell down exhausted, to die—soldier and horse and ox!

Picture the long procession climbing the steep, stony pathway—cavalry, artillery, infantry—all proceeding at a foot-pace; innumerable pack-horses blocking the path, innumerable ox-carts; grey mountains stretching to right and left, and the grey look of hunger on the faces of most of the troops, for these men were famishing, they were marching with empty stomachs; and the horses and the oxen lacked forage—hunger accompanied the army all the way, gnawing hunger.

When a starved horse fell, the soldiers used their knives with ghastly celerity. At first we sickened and our horses reared and plunged, passing these pools of blood, but we got hardened to the sight at last; it was infinitely more painful watching the abandoned horses, who would often stand motionless on the very edge of the precipice—waiting in dumb agony for death.

The oxen stumbled to their knees and were dragged on again, poor patient beasts with their dark, sorrowful eyes; the mud was often a foot deep in places, and the horses that stuck in it had to be left to their fate, just as the soldiers had to be who fell out exhausted, for the army had at all costs to press on—the army had to be saved. Serbia had put practically all her manhood into the field; the *dernier réserve* had been called out, and this meant that boys as well as old men were serving under the colours; so for the sake of the future—Serbia's future—her men had to safeguard their lives, determine to

exist; but it must not be forgotten that the soldiers ascending the steep mountain path had a terrible spiritual as well as physical burden to carry—they did not know what fate had befallen their women or their children. I have already quoted an individual case, but think of the burden upon a whole army.

Pity the troops—marching on blindly, aware that their nearest and dearest were in the hands of hated foes. Men's faces sharpened day after day, hour after hour, as they wondered what was happening to their mothers, their wives, their sisters, their sweethearts. Big tears would roll down the cheeks of fathers who thought of their children, and they were aware—these poor fellows—that it would be months before they could have any definite news as to what was really happening in Serbia; but they knew—most tragic knowledge—that their cities, their homes, and their families were at the mercy of the Huns, the Austrians, and the Bulgarians; and the iron entered into the soul of the troops; they suffered not only physically, but spiritually.

Their physical sufferings were bad enough, God knows. The cold was intense, and the whole army could only proceed at a snail's pace owing to the congested condition of the precipitous path. Often long and tedious halts occurred; the snow lay thick in places, and there was no getting away from the deep, slushy mud; the very heavens frowned, for rain fell heavily day after day and night after night; the soldiers

got soaked to their very skins, and the icy wind blew through their tattered uniforms; their broken boots let in water at every step they took. And hunger pressed them always.

And there was grim irony in their hunger, for it had been represented to them that they would not go hungry any farther than Andreavitza, while Scutari, happily reached, was to be a veritable haven of refuge, a land flowing with milk and honey.

It was this assurance that had encouraged the already disheartened and weary men to face the terrible fatigues of the march across the Montenegrin and Albanian mountains. The decision to proceed was reached by the "Quartier Général" upon definite Montenegrin promises of food, support, and assistance within the confines of their country. There was no talk of Corfu or Tunis in those days; it was confidently anticipated that the retreating but undefeated Serbian armies could be gathered together at Scutari, where they could enjoy the rest that was so essential to them, and where the work of reorganization could be undertaken.

"There will be food in plenty when you reach Andreavitza"—so the already half-famished men were assured when at Petch they found themselves confronted by the great range of snow-clad mountains that barred their further passage.

It was a long march, five or six days at least under the conditions that prevailed, but the men

faced it with the dogged bravery and determination that characterized them.

They needed food, and food was promised them at Andreavitza. They were already spent; they had undergone terrible privations; they had marched hundreds of miles, fighting rear-guard actions all the way; they were tired and footsore, hungry and dispirited; their clothes were falling from them; dysentery and sickness were running rampant. Nevertheless, in the good hope of better things in store, trusting blindly in the promises made to them—that in a few days' time they would find rest and nourishment—they cheerfully faced conditions worse by far than any which had gone before.

And when they reached Andreavitza after sufferings that will never be fully described—not all of them, for there were many that fell by the way—it was to find no food awaiting them, no rest. Perhaps it was not the fault of the Montenegrin authorities; they had been anticipating the arrival of supplies via Italy, and these had not arrived. Once again "too late" was to be the horrid burden of the song.

And so the cry was "On to Scutari." There was, indeed, no choice in the matter. But the element of doubt had stepped in by now; they no longer felt quite sure of Scutari as a "haven of refuge, a land flowing with milk and honey." Since supplies had failed at Andreavitza it must mean that they were deficient farther on; and then vague rumours were percolating through—

rumours of enemy advance and of an eventual attack upon the Albanian coast towns. Scutari would not be spared. Where then would be the promised rest ?

It is a wonderful thing that in face of all this the Serbian army at Andreavitza behaved with such astonishing fortitude. It must stand to their eternal credit that they did not give way—as many of their officers feared they might—get out of hand and loot the town. Instead of that they set their teeth, remembering the honour of their country, and with invincible bravery prepared to set out anew, weary and unrefreshed as they were, upon the long march, double the distance that they had covered from Petch, and hardly less difficult, to Podgoritza and Scutari. And at Scutari their fears were justified : there was no rest there.

It is terrible to have lived through days such as these. To us the privations that we endured, the discomforts, the frequent lack of food, were as nothing to the sense of participation in so hideous a tragedy, the knowledge of one's utter inability to stem, in the smallest degree, the inexorable tide of disaster.

We too at Petch had regarded the future hopefully—once those grim mountains were crossed.

" We must hurry through to Velika "—so M. Brabatz had declared. " Once there we shall be in Old Montenegro, and there will no longer be any danger from marauding Albanian bands. We

may do it in two days—more likely three. At Velika the mountains are passed, and it is a clear road on to Andreavitza."

Our orderly, Chirovitch, agreed.

"They are good people beyond Velika," he said.

For ourselves, now regarding Scutari as our goal, we started off fairly hopefully from Petch.

We had anticipated having two horses, one to ride and one to carry our baggage—such as it was, for by now we had practically nothing left. But we had learnt not to grumble. The less one had the easier it was to travel.

We were disappointed of our second horse, and so we had to pack our belongings upon the one we had, our own dear Pigeon. This arrangement meant that we must both walk, but we promised ourselves to look out for another horse *en route*. It was likely that we could get our baggage transferred to one of the army transport horses.

Very soon after Petch is left behind the path narrows and plunges into a ravine between the mountains. Here we soon came up with a marvellous turmoil of fugitives. An army in flight, orderly but without definite order—a sort of "go-as-you-please" procession. The loaded pack-horses rubbed shoulders with long-horned bullocks; flocks of goats and sheep and pigs, whose destination was, no doubt, some mountain village, blocked the way embarrassingly. Civilian refugees, too, men, women, and children—one



A Montenegrin Rest House or 'Han'

wondered at first, seeing the long trailing line of humanity and beast of burden clambering laboriously up the mountain path, how one was going to make any progress at all.

Nevertheless M. Brabatz started to push ahead. We had caught up part of the Army Staff, but there were others who had gone on in advance.

"Leave Pigeon with Chirovitch and the Staff," he said. "We can wait for them wherever we decide to spend the night."

We agreed to this, and it was to our undoing, for Pigeon carried our wraps and coats and all the food that we possessed, and, as events turned out, we saw nothing more of him or of Chirovitch till near noon the following day.

So it was our own fault, in a great measure, that we spent twenty-four hours of horrible discomfort. We were hungry by midday, when we caught up the rest of the Staff, but they had finished their meal, and we did not care to beg. Then we pinned our faith upon the possibilities of a "rest house"—the first on the route—a little farther on; but it proved to be a hovel, and there was nothing to be had.

We should have been wise if we had waited at that hovel, for it was there that the Staff—with Chirovitch and Pigeon—spent the night; instead, we allowed ourselves to be beguiled by stories of the supposed possibilities in the way of food and lodging of a village called Kuchista. It was

still a long way to go, and we were tired; nevertheless we determined to struggle on.

And so it happened that night threatened to overtake us when we were still at least an hour's walk from the village. The path had descended sharply into a narrow inhospitable valley, and before we had proceeded far along it we found that we were quite alone—M. Brabatz and ourselves—which is exactly what we had been most seriously warned against. Every one else, all the crowding traffic of the day, had already gone into camp.

"We are in a most dangerous country," said M. Brabatz encouragingly. "It is more than likely that the Arnauts are watching us from the woods on the other side of the river. And we are within easy range if they elect to shoot."

It was a characteristic speech. M. Brabatz was disposed to be an alarmist. But under the circumstances it was very discomforting, especially for Alice, who was so worn out with fatigue and want of food that, as she declared afterwards, she would not have minded much if the Arnauts had elected to shoot and so put an end to it all. Indeed, she was so done up that it seemed as if we should have to stay where we were, Arnauts or no Arnauts, without wraps or food, and await the morning. Luckily, however, just as it seemed inevitable that she must give in, two things happened; the first was that we came across three men sitting round a fire and making tea, of which they allowed us to partake with them—

there was nothing to eat, but the tea acted as a much-needed stimulant, so much so that we were about to set out again, when the second event occurred. This was the appearance of several belated officers, with their orderlies, on horseback. They were quite unknown to us, but with characteristic Serbian thoughtfulness and generosity, recognizing our plight, they dismounted and proffered horses.

And so, in darkness, we approached Kuchista, and at first we were under the impression that we had come not merely to a large village, but even to a considerable town. The whole hill-side was aglow with lights. Here, certainly, we should find rest, warmth, and refreshment.

Rarely in our lives had we been so bitterly deceived. Kuchista was no town, hardly even a village—half a dozen hovels spread about over the hill—no more. Those lights that had seemed so full of promise came from camp fires, and not from houses. Like Jack-o'-lanterns on a marsh, they had beguiled us to hopes doomed only to be shattered.

There was nothing for it but to ask hospitality at one of these camp fires, and, cold as we were, we wasted no time in selection. We found a half-dismantled barn, open at both ends and with its roof and walls already partially pulled to pieces for firewood, which was occupied by some half-dozen groups of men, each having its own fire. There were three such barns in a cluster, all tenanted in the same way. There was a more

solid structure, too, a stone-built house, though half in ruins; but this had apparently been appropriated to the use of sick men, and a look inside was sufficient to make one turn shuddering away.

We were not readily accorded the hospitality we sought. At one end of the barn we had selected there was a large group of men, and they had food in abundance—bread was being cut up and passed round, while there was an entire pig roasting upon a spit before the fire. But they would admit no one else to their circle, and as for food, money could not purchase it that night. Perhaps in the morning, if any fragments should remain—small solace was this to us!

Eventually we found friends. They were strangers to us, but the kindness they displayed merits the term. It was near midnight when they invited us to join them; till then we had been sitting at the extreme edge of the barn, with practically no cover whatever from the cold wind that blew through it. There was a fire, but we had to keep it up ourselves, and the only way to obtain fuel was to tear down planks from the walls of the barns—I remember finding this grimly humorous, especially as we directed our depredations against the other barns rather than our own. Then we had to sit upright upon a plank, any deviation from which would land us perforce into mud and filth. Without wraps or overcoats, without food since the early morning, well might M. Brabatz remark resignedly when

we accepted our fate: "This will be a long night!"

Our new friends, however, were better placed. They were farther in the barn, had a good and well-fuelled fire, and they had erected a sort of screen against the wind. Also the ground was firmer—less foul. No doubt it was the feminine element in our party that aroused their pity, but they were equally kind to us all. More especially do I recall one little incident.

The old man who lay alongside me had a big rug to cover him. As I had none, not even a coat, he insisted on putting me between himself and the fire, and in such a position that I could get a little support for my back against the wall. In the middle of the night, when he thought I was asleep, I felt him unroll a goodly portion of his rug and surreptitiously throw it over me. He had offered earlier to share it, but I had naturally refused to rob him of his covering. It was a graceful act and quite spontaneous.

It was a weird night we spent in that barn, with the full moon shining right through it—a night not soon to be forgotten. The lurid firelight, the uncouth shadows, the muttering voices; it was difficult to realize that one was not lost in some ugly dream.

In the morning, as soon as it was dawn, our friends prepared tea. They were no better off than ourselves in the way of food, but they were lavish with their sugar. It is astonishing how much nourishment one can get, when one

is really hungry, from sucking a piece of sugar. This was by no means the only time that we learnt to realize that fact.

Of course we were famishing by now, but we encouraged each other with the assurance that the Staff—with Pigeon and Chirovitch—were bound to turn up quickly. At seven perhaps—certainly not later than nine. And the Staff would have food in plenty; so M. Brabatz declared.

The barn emptied by degrees. Our kind acquaintances of the night took leave of us. We replenished our fire from the remains of the others, and waited with all the patience we could muster. Very soon the day's traffic began. From where we sat we could watch the endless procession as it wound down the mountain side to the rickety wooden bridge across the river by the side of which we had spent the night.

Nine o'clock—ten—eleven. Again and again we imagined we saw the white form of Pigeon, led by Chirovitch, descending the slope; but again and again we were at fault.

By half-past eleven we were really desperate. All manner of people kept passing along the road, and many had food, but one could not beg of strangers, and we knew that it would be the same with others as with ourselves. They must hoard what they had against the long journey in front.

And then relief came, in the shape of a French officer of our acquaintance. He was travelling with a division of the army, and had access to

their stores. No sooner did he hear what had befallen us than he provided us with food in plenty. We had hot coffee, Nestlé's milk, preserved meat, sardines, bread, and biscuit.

Hardly had we settled down to our meal—it was thirty hours since we had had anything to eat—than the Staff arrived. They were munching potatoes, the only food that they could muster just then. When they saw our lavish meal they fell upon it eagerly; so in the end it was we who fed them instead of they who fed us. But Chirovitch and Pigeon had arrived safely too.

It may be imagined that we were glad to take our departure from that spot of such uncomfortable memories. But we were not to get away without another incident which, though we thought little of it at the time, gave us food for reflection later on.

While we sat round the fire with our friends of the Staff, enjoying our meal, a Serbian soldier had approached and laid himself down at full length, outside our circle, but as near to the fire as he could get. We had so much to talk about that we hardly noticed him, nor did he attempt to address us till we were about to depart. Then, very faintly, he asked if he might draw nearer to the fire, also if we could give him a small piece of bread. For a man of his station his voice was curiously refined.

We gave him all we had left over from our meal, which was not much, though far more than

he had evidently expected. Then we went away, and new difficulties to be confronted soon engendered forgetfulness.

But afterwards—days afterwards—with knowledge gained from experience, we often recalled to mind that sick soldier, his desire for rest and warmth, his hunger for bread.

For with our own eyes we had seen men die of starvation and fatigue. We had seen the dead lying by the roadside with none to bury them.

With these things in mind the memory often revives of a pale pinched face, young and handsome, that of a man with his life before him, and of a weak refined voice begging for warmth and bread. And then we ask ourselves if we could not have been more helpful than we were, and we wonder what that young man's fate may have been. We shall never know.

Starting so late, we could not make much progress that day. The path was difficult, mainly owing to the mud, and our experiences of the night had hardly left us fit for great fatigues; yet fatigue was inevitable when we could hardly take a step without having literally to drag one's feet from mud into which they had sunk up to the ankles. Feminine footgear, not made for this sort of thing, suffered severely, and progress was constantly impeded by the loss of a shoe which had to be dug out with some difficulty. Alice trudged drearily on, shoehorn in hand, but it was palpable that her strength could not be expected to hold out. But once again, as in the

night, I found subject for ironic mirth. This was when I saw her helping herself up a steep slope by clutching hold of the horn of a big ox. At home she would walk a mile to avoid a cow.

Luckily, before we had proceeded far, the kind offer of a pack-horse brought relief. Pigeon was once again turned to his true purpose, and all was well.

But it was a terrible path, a path the horrors of which might well affect the nerves even of the strongest. Carcasses of dead beasts, horses, and oxen, in all stages of decay, were to be met every few yards. Pigeon did not like them, and now and then would shy dangerously. Sometimes the poor creatures were not quite dead; they would lift their heads and stare at the passers-by with glazing eyes. There were eagles that hovered low, and at night the wolves would come down.

A cruel repulsive path through a narrow valley without sign of human cultivation or habitation. The mountain sides were bare and precipitous, and there were rocky masses to which one's imagination could easily lend human shape. Demons that mocked us as we dragged ourselves along—that is what they seemed to us. There was one weirdly fantastic figure that haunted us for quite a long way. It was like a giant ape with long lean arms extended, and bony fingers that clutched the missile which it was about to hurl. So real did it appear, standing up along on a ledge of rock across the river, that

one had to look well before one realized that it was no more than the remains of a lightning-blasted tree.

After our recent experiences we were terribly afraid as to what our fate for the night might be, and when we reached Bycluk, at the foot of the great mountain which the Serbs call Tchachak, beyond which it would not be wise to venture that day, our hearts sank within us.

For it was a ghastly place. Two or three wooden sheds stood in a field of mud, and you could not turn in any direction without your eyes resting upon some dead thing. Camps were already being formed. Were we, too, destined to spend a night among these abominations ?

Luckily we found shelter, and such was our relief that we could hardly find words to express it. We had a tiny room to ourselves, like a cabin on board ship, with two berths one above the other. Straw was laid down in these, and if the straw had been clean it would have been quite comfortable; but we were really too tired to mind. There was a stove, too, and Chirovitch, who slept on the floor, kept the fire going all night, which was a good thing, for it was bitterly cold.

Pigeon, well fed—it was not always that we could feed him well—was tethered just outside. There was no stable, and we dared not leave him far away, for fear of thieves. Chirovitch was very emphatic on the subject.

" We are not yet among the good people," he said.

This meant across Tchachak and in Old Montenegro, where we hoped to be the next day.

Our cabin did not boast a window, only a little sliding trap, and soon after we had climbed into our berths we were startled to see the trap opening slowly. Somebody was palpably manipulating it from the outside. It seemed most certainly a case for holding one's revolver in readiness.

Very slowly the trap was thrown back, and presently we saw that this was due to no human hand; in the dim light we could distinguish a queer-shaped white thing, and it was a few moments before the mysterious apparition revealed itself for what it was.

It was no more nor less than Pigeon's nose. Pigeon was still hungry and was asking for bread, of which he was particularly fond. Needless to say, he got it.

The following day, well rested, we crossed the dreaded Mount Tchachak in safety, and reached Velika in good time. We were cheered and happy. We were "beyond the mountains." They stood up in grim semicircle, but they were behind us now, not before, as they had been at Petch. We were nearing Andreavitza—the outskirt of the land of promise.

Velika was distinctly an improvement upon Bycluk, though there were dead horses there as well. We obtained accommodation in a farm—a bed made up upon the floor in a little room where the family seemed to keep all their possessions, for it was with the greatest difficulty that

we could induce them to leave us to ourselves. There was a stable for Pigeon, and Chirovitch decided that he would sleep there too.

We pointed out that he himself had declared we should find "good people" when we got to Velika. He admitted this; nevertheless he slept in the stable.

This meant nothing to us at the time, but we might have taken it as a presage for the future. Chirovitch and his "good people"! When we met with overcharging and incivility at Andreavitza, we were told we should find the "good people" on the road as we proceeded; when we were literally rolled upon the road, we must wait till we got to Podgoritza; when Podgoritza failed to come up to the mark, the "good people" of Montenegro were finally limited to Nikshish, which was our orderly's native town. We never went to Nikshish, so we were unable to dispute the claim.

Our spirits were high when we set out the following day for Andreavitza, and they were maintained until we reached that little town. The morning was sunny and warm. Were we not on the sunny side of the mountains? When we reached Podgoritza we should eat pomegranates. We fondly imagined that we were coming to a Riviera-like climate.

It was certainly very different to what we had gone through. The road lay along a broad green valley, and there were plenty of houses scattered about, and peasants came out to sell

fruit and wine and "rakia" to the soldiers as they passed.

The soldiers were happy too. The promised rest and refreshment were so near at hand. From every side one heard the sound of shooting; it is a way they have of marking their pleasure.

And so at night, full of expectation, we came to Andreavitza, and it was only with great difficulty, through the kindness of a friend, that we obtained a room at all—a bare room that contained nothing whatever except a couple of beds with scant coverings to them, for which luxurious apartment we were expected to pay rather more than ten francs a day. And there was no food to be had that night, none at all. We had to go hungry to bed.

But of the real tragedy—the failure of supplies in the army—we only knew later.

CHAPTER XIII

FROM ANDREAVITZA TO SCUTARI

THE happy spirit in which we approached Andreavitza was marred by what was in itself a small mischance. We had not allowed ourselves quite enough time to reach our destination before dark; perhaps we had dallied too long upon the way. We were both riding on this occasion, and so imagined we had plenty of time.

Consequently a series of small accidents occurred owing to the pitch darkness that had set in. It was aggravating, too, to see the lights of the town apparently within a stone's-throw—real town lights this time, not the deceptive camp fires—and yet to find that a deep intervening valley and a broad river made a long detour necessary. The bridge over the river, when we came to it, was a ramshackle affair, and so I had to dismount and lead Pigeon while Chirovitch took charge of my horse. There was the usual crowd crossing the bridge at the same time, and a pack-horse, getting out of hand, forced its way forward between Pigeon and the rickety handrail, with the result that I was very nearly swept into the river while Pigeon pranced dangerously and the whole procession

was thrown out of gear. The bridge shook and creaked ominously but held good, and somehow we all managed to get disentangled without any great harm being done. But it was an anxious moment.

The other side of the bridge we plunged into a great camp and lost the road altogether. Everybody gave us different directions as to the way into the town, and in attempting to follow these out we got into repeated difficulties. In the darkness we could not see where we were going, consequently we drifted among trees, the branches of which threatened to sweep Alice from her saddle, the horses nearly pitched into a stream that suddenly confronted us, and we found ourselves brought up against a sort of wire entanglement that had to be broken down before we could proceed. Finally, when we got into the town it was to be told that there wasn't a room to be had anywhere. It is no wonder that our spirits sank.

That we did get a room in the end was due to chance and to our friend, Lieutenant Vikert—he had engaged it for his commandant, who, luckily for us, had not turned up. M. Vikert was the young Austro-Serb of whom I have already spoken and the fiancé of the lady who, with her mother, travelled with us from Prizren to Petch. They had left Petch some days before us, and M. Vikert, released now from his military duties, was pursuing them with all the speed that he could muster. Of course it was impossible to

communicate or to let them know that he was so close behind.

We had seen a good deal of M. Vikert while we were at Skoplje and so we were glad to hear his news. Among other things he told us how a German aeroplane had been forced to descend on Serbian soil and the pilot and observer had been taken prisoners. They were very well treated at Skoplje, and the latter, an officer, was placed under the charge of our friend, who, so he assured us, found it very difficult at times to keep his temper under control in face of the arrogant tone adopted by the German. They used to take their meals together at one of the cafés on the Vardar, and the Bosch amused himself by making sarcastic remarks about every one in the place. It is a curious point that the Americans seemed to anger him most. There were some half-dozen of them who regularly occupied a table close by, and whenever he saw them he would scowl and mutter under his breath: "Yankees, verpfluchte Yankees!" This fellow was eventually removed to Prishtina, whence, in the true spirit of his country, being allowed out on parole, he promptly made his escape.

Talking of prisoners in Serbia, there were a great many Austrians in the country since the rout of the preceding winter. They suffered terribly during the typhus epidemic, but had little to complain of as to their general treatment. Many with whom I spoke were only too glad

that they had been taken prisoners. We had a number of them as orderlies at the hospital, and very good servants they made.

When the retreat began the question of the treatment of the prisoners became a difficult one. There was, I know, a threatened rising at Nish which had to be put down with a heavy hand. Since they could not well be left behind it was decided that they must march too, and so they were sent, in advance of the armies, some to Monastir and some—those who followed the same route as ourselves—eventually to Valona. They suffered terribly, dying like flies by the roadside, and who was to blame? Not Serbia, who shared this martyrdom of war.

We were glad of a couple of days' rest at Andreavitza, and though we were astonished at the price that was being asked for bread, and at the fact that food seemed so very scarce, we were still under the impression that the worst part of the sufferings of the army was at an end. We knew that there was a good road to Podgoritza, and imagined that this part of the flight, under improved weather conditions—it was quite warm and sunny at Andreavitza—and with the expected food-supplies, would be ever so much easier. It was only a day or two later that we learnt the truth—that the army was continuing its march with absolute famine staring it in the face.

We had heard the soldiers firing off their guns in joy at their arrival at Andreavitza—but never

again, in our hearing, was a shot fired in that same spirit.

We had fondly hoped that we should be able to get to Podgoritza by car as, under ordinary circumstances, there is a regular service, but we were soon told that this would not be possible. There were broken bridges and the road in places was not negotiable. We accepted the alternative with all the cheerfulness that we could muster, and set off early one morning, Alice riding Pigeon, and myself and Chirovitch on foot. We were ill-provisioned for a probable four days' journey—a loaf and a half of bread, sugar, tea, a little cocoa, a couple of tins of "confection," the remains of our margarine and five tins of Nestlé's milk—most valuable of possessions which, by luck, I had been able to pick up at Andreavitza.

But the sun was shining and we were under the spell of several fond delusions. We imagined that the weather would continue warm and bright—that we were approaching a Riviera-like climate; also that all danger of enemy attack was over and done with; and, finally, that Scutari would see the end of our troubles as well as those of the whole Serbian army. Scutari was still to us the city of refuge.

As we walked we discussed the book that we should publish one day when we got safe home again. What title should we give it? We decided upon its title then and there. It was to be: "From Pirot to Scutari." We had not the

faintest suspicion that Scutari might not be the end.

We halted for a few moments a little way out, and on proceeding I found that I had dropped my woollen gloves. I went back and searched for them in vain. But I came back laughing; what did it matter? The weather was warm and was going to be warmer; I had no need of thick gloves.

We were soon among the mountains again, and the scenery for a while was very beautiful, well wooded and with beautiful views backward down the valley. Then the road began to rise, and we could see nothing in front of us but an amphitheatre of forbidding snow-girt summits about which a black mist seemed to be gathering ominously. Alice, with memories of Tchachak still fresh upon her, hazarded a timorous hope that we might not find we had another mountain to cross. And I laughed the very idea to scorn; certainly there was another ascent, I had heard of that—but an easy slope—nothing more—no comparison with Tchachak; yet even as I spoke I looked ahead and felt distinctly uncomfortable.

It was worse than Tchachak, far worse, in spite of the good road. For hours we toiled up and up and the summit seemed farther away than ever. The sun disappeared and the mist enveloped us; snow lay heavy upon the road, and a biting cold wind nipped us cruelly; I would have given pounds for the gloves I had so thoughtlessly scorned a few hours earlier. We

could see the road below and the road above winding in great sweeps, and upon it, like ants in migration, the slow-moving procession of men and beasts that somehow looked different to us now than it had done that morning; it was as if the spectres of fatigue and hunger and pain had power to materialize among those barren wastes to which we had come, and to show themselves naked and bleeding and hideous as they really were. It was then, I think, that the truth dawned upon us, though no one had spoken it as yet.

And it was as we toiled along that there came a whirring sound above our heads, and we soon realized the presence of an enemy aeroplane. It did us no harm, hovered for a little while low and scornfully heedless of the futile efforts to reach it with rifle fire, and then disappeared—no doubt to make an eventual report as to the position of the Serbian army.

We glanced at each other. Free from enemy attack! Were we? Was the pursuit to be continued even across the mountains of Montenegro?

I had a horse lent me for the latter part of the ascent, but I was glad to dismount and walk again, for my hands were so cold that I could not hold the reins. The horse was nervous too, and started at every dead thing by the roadside —and there were plenty of them, ghastly remains in every stage of decomposition.

"Perhaps it will be better the other side," I

hazarded when we reached the summit; but I had little hope nor need I have indulged in any at all—for what we looked down upon, through a curtain of drenching mist, was as bleak and barren a valley as can well be imagined. There was hardly a sign of human habitation, and darkness was coming on. Were we in for another terrible night?

We struggled down the mountain side as best we could, but it was quite dark before we came across the first of about half a dozen miserable stone houses, a hundred yards or so apart, that constituted a so-called village. And we asked for shelter at house after house only to meet with curt refusal.

The one that appeared to be last of all was more hospitable. We were shown a room, floorless and windowless, in the centre of which a wood fire was burning; some dozen people, their wet clothes steaming, crouched over it. The fire threw their figures into lurid relief.

"That's all there is; you may stay if you want to, and are ready to pay," said the old hag who was evidently the presiding genius of this luxurious abode.

But we couldn't do it. One whiff of the atmosphere of that apartment was enough to drive us back to the cold and the rain outside.

"We shan't find another house for miles," said Chirovitch in his usual happy way. But we took our chance. We went on.

We found another house—it really was the last

one this time—and a Serbian officer who had secured a bed for himself abandoned it to us with ready and characteristic generosity. For himself he declared he could spend the night comfortably enough in the common-room with the refugees who had already arranged to sleep there; as for our room, the trouble was that we could not have it to ourselves as one of the two small beds it contained was already apportioned to a Montenegrin gentleman. But we were already accustomed to this sort of thing and it didn't worry us much.

A sense of humour will often carry one through the most trying situations. It was lucky for us that we were able to appreciate the grotesque, rather than the ugly, side of things that night. Our room was very small; there was just room for the two beds with a narrow space between them; no other furniture whatever, but in that space there was a large keg containing sugar—how the people had got it heaven alone knows, for sugar was very expensive in those days—while at the foot of the beds was a barrel on which stood a big carafe of "rakia" with a number of little glasses, and in a corner was the family money-box. We soon found out that when anybody wanted "rakia"—and there was a constant demand for it till a late hour—it had to be fetched from our room; while the same rule applied to sugar for tea or coffee and to the requirements of small change derived from the money-box.

Since we found that we could not expect to be without company we sat up drinking tea—the weak Serbian "chaj"—with M. Vikert, who had turned up and was going to spend the night with the rest in the common-room. We were remarkably thirsty, and could not drink enough—it has been asserted that he and I took fourteen glasses apiece before we were satisfied. "Chaj," by the way, is always drunk out of a tumbler. I am afraid we effected a saving upon our own store of sugar by helping ourselves from the keg—it was too palpable a temptation to be resisted. We could have taken "rakia" or money with equal facility.

We laid down at last in our wet clothes and tried to get some sleep, but the people of the house were evidently in a jovial mood, for a gously was produced—from under our bed—and an extemporary concert began in an adjoining room. I have never been able to appreciate the peculiar charm of that one-stringed instrument, and certainly failed to do so on that occasion.

After a long and noisy interval our Montenegrin companion came to bed. It is possible that he had taken too much "rakia," for he was unable to remove his clothes; the task was executed for him by one of the ladies of the house—a wild-looking creature whose hair hung about her face in dishevelled curls; she literally undressed and put him to bed, then extinguished the little lamp and stole out.

After that we were allowed to get what sleep we might.

We were heavily overcharged for that night's accommodation, and it was curious to contemplate the mingled cupidity and simplicity of our hosts—for we might easily have paid them whatever they asked with their own coin—that money-box having been left so invitingly open for us to help ourselves had we so desired; as it was, I had to keep a sharp eye on Chirovitch, who was by no means to be trusted. I only found out later on that he had helped himself largely to the sugar and had tried to sell a bagful of it to M. Vikert, having probably forgotten that the latter must have known whence it was derived; or perhaps, since he was a cunning rogue, he relied upon the fact that neither M. Vikert nor I could say very much, our consciences not being altogether clear.

We got off from Bari, as this place was called, in drenching rain and amid discontented cries of "Josh, josh"—"More, more"—from several of the witchlike women and girls who seemed to be the principal occupants of the "han." Yet we had paid for our accommodation at almost the rate that we might have done for a suite of rooms at the Ritz or the Carlton. To make matters worse, we contrived to leave one or two useful articles behind—slippers and such like—and when Chirovitch went back for them, of course they were not to be found. So we paid pretty heavily for our sugar.

We had a rough time of it that day—and so did the army. I do not care to dwell upon the constant incidents of the road—I have hinted at them and it was always the same thing repeated over and over again with hideous monotony. But there was one occasion when a dying horse, that lifted its head pitifully and unexpectedly, nearly brought me to destruction.

I had accepted a lift in a wagon drawn by three horses, which, with a couple of other carts, was under the control of a French officer. The wagons carried the equipment of a dismantled wireless installation. We were passing a particularly nasty piece of road when one of our horses suddenly shied—for the reason mentioned above. The next moment its forefeet were over the precipice, and had it not been for the very smart interference of some passing soldiers it is likely that none of us in that wagon would have lived to tell the tale.

That experience, which should have been enough to last a little while, was followed by one of the most unpleasant of all that we encountered.

I had been unlucky in losing several small things that day and the day before—I have spoken of gloves and slippers—highly useful articles but not indispensable. Alice remarked jokingly that if I went on like that I should end by losing Chirovitch and Pigeon—and her. Which is exactly what I did.

It was because of that lift on the wagon. I had imagined that with three horses it should

make good way—at any rate travel faster than Chirovitch and I could walk. Alice, of course, was still riding Pigeon. But progress turned out to be very slow, and demands for "rakia" were frequent. Consequently we arranged that Alice and Chirovitch should go on ahead, and that when they had reached the village where we proposed to stay the night they should look out for the best accommodation they could find. I was bound to come up with them at last.

We ought to have known our Montenegrin "villages" better. They are not villages as we understand them in England. The term is applied to a whole district of scattered houses—as we had found at Bari—covering, more often than not, a good many miles of ground. Generally speaking, there are very few houses to such a "village"—perhaps not a dozen altogether.

The trouble came in when darkness fell and the drivers of the little "train," of which my wagon formed a part, decided that one particular house represented the village and decided to stay there for the night. We had passed several houses at various distances apart, and they declared that there were none farther on.

Was it possible that I had missed Alice at one of those houses? Should I go on? Should I go back? Night fell pitch dark, with the ceaseless cold drizzling rain, and when I tried to switch on my electric torch I found it was exhausted, nor did I possess a refill.

I decided to walk on, carrying with me the

awkward bundles which contained our food and other minor properties; that was another source of worry—all the food was with me.

I must have walked a mile before I gave it up as a bad job. I was continually tempted farther by that constant source of deception, a glitter of light which might have been from a house, but which invariably turned out to be a camp fire. The road, I knew, was anything but safe; but that worried me more on Alice's account than my own—I had my revolver; but I was really afraid for her, more particularly as I felt by no means sure of Chirovitch's fidelity.

I returned to the wagon and the sympathetic French officer, and spent an hour or so in misery. How the night would have passed, heaven alone knows—luckily the suspense was ended by the appearance of Chirovitch at about ten o'clock. Alice was really on ahead—I had walked to within a few minutes of the house.

So we had to set out again, and tired though I was the road did not seem so very long; nor, I fancy, did Alice or I mind much though the conditions under which we passed the rest of that night were particularly uncomfortable. We slept on the floor of a room which we shared with a Serbian officer and a whole family of eight or nine people, including a dirty and very mischievous child and a howling baby. And there was another sort of population in that room as well, a population that successfully contrived to rob us of all rest.

The character of the scenery changed the next day and, if such a thing is possible, by no means for the better. Alas for our fond ideas of Riviera-like climate and country! Had we ever anticipated a journey through Montenegro—quite apart from the wild chase that fate had developed—we should have taken steps to learn something a little more definite about the country; as it was we had to depend upon that most drastic of taskmasters—experience.

We had entered into the wilderness of stones that is particularly characteristic of Montenegro and which no doubt suggested the name. Anything more desolate, more repellent, it would be difficult to imagine. And it is not as if this condition were confined to a district that one can hurry through and then breathe again; no, you may turn whichever way you please in Central and Western Montenegro and you will find no escape from the nightmare horror of stony barrenness. Even in a town like Podgoritza, which lies in a plain, you are aware of its close proximity.

Imagine a vast sea, storm-tossed into huge waves, and then suddenly solidified into a stony mass; that is how the scene appeared to us when we first gazed round upon it from the high elevation upon which we stood. There were stones above and below, stones before and behind, stones on every side. We looked down a giddy precipice of stones, and over our heads were great stone masses that seemed ready to fall and

crush us at every step we took. We could see the road trailing miles ahead like a great serpent lying inert in its chosen fastness. And the sky was grey and the stones were grey, and if you looked at the faces of the men who walked with you along that grey track you would see that they were grey too—and it was a tint that would not fade away even though by chance the sun might shine once more.

We were walking by the side of a steep precipice and I asked Alice a little anxiously if she felt giddy. She answered, with a shudder, that she did, but it wasn't because of the great depth at our feet, it was because of the grey hopelessness of everything around.

We walked for interminable miles through scenery such as this. There was hardly ever a house to be seen—if there happened to be one it was a wretched hovel of stone. What was the use of houses when there was practically no ground to cultivate? There was not even grass for the mountain goats between the stones; their food had to be stored for them in little stacks which here and there made queer excrescences upon the mountain side. Now and then, but very rarely, you would see a small semicircle from which the stones had been cleared away, and where there were still signs of a brave effort at some sort of rough agriculture.

I got a lift for a portion of the way upon an artillery wagon that was drawn by six sturdy oxen. We got along much quicker upon this

than upon the Marconi wagon the day before, and it was rather an exciting drive, for we always seemed to be hanging over the precipice or driving others into a position of imminent danger. I often recall, even now, the thrilling moments of that drive; the speeding up of the oxen through the thronging masses of the road; the abrupt corners round which we swayed so perilously; the painful jolting over stones and fissures; the brave beasts pulling so willingly, heedless of the blows that were showered upon them; the shouting of the drivers to clear the way: "Ide-ide polako-nachpred-stani-begi!" Those words, like the burden of a cruel song, will vie with the sound of trampling feet to haunt me for the rest of my life.

It may come as a surprise to some to read of artillery at this stage of the retreat. As a matter of fact a considerable number of guns—no less, indeed, than forty-eight—were brought safely to Scutari. Of course they were not dragged across Tchachak—though I believe that even that might have been undertaken in order to save them if there had been no other way practicable. Luckily there was another route from Petch to Andreavitza by way of Rozhaj, longer but less steep. It was that route which was chosen for the artillery and transport wagons.

The cold forced me to take to my feet again after a time. My bare hands were simply numbed, and when I had climbed down off the wagon I could scarcly stand upright. It was

much the same with Alice on Pigeon; she, too, was feeling the cold very acutely.

That night we reached a "village" called Verucha. It consisted, as usual, of a few scattered stone houses, and not one of them seemed ready to take us in. At last, however, we found a man who said: "I will give you a room if you care to pay my price. My price is thirty peppers."

A "pepper" is the Montenegrin equivalent of a franc. One says the same of the Serbian "dinar," but the wily Montenegrin made a good profit off the Serbian stranger in his midst by refusing to give more than nine peppers for a "bank" or Serbian ten dinar bill.

I had to consent to pay those thirty peppers. It was raining outside and bitterly cold. A night in the open was not to be contemplated. But what an example of Montenegrin "hospitality"!

It was surpassed by the experience of an officer friend of ours. He was forced to pay fifty peppers for the privilege of being allowed to sit, with two friends, by a fire in the company of a dozen other people. There was no question of a bed—merely a roof over their heads.

Our room was a place in which one would hardly willingly have kennelled a dog. It had no stove and so we had to keep the door open to get the benefit of the fire outside, round which the men sat and drank "rakia." Over and over again during the night there came a knocking at

the door with shouted requests for shelter or at least for a drop of the refreshing spirit. But the answer was invariably, "Nema—nema bogomi" —though there was "rakia" in abundance, and plenty of room round the fire.

The Montenegrin cheerfully perjures his soul every five minutes with the use of his favourite word "Bogomi"—"God help me." It is constantly upon his lips, and more frequently than not it testifies to an untruth.

A wounded officer had been turned out to make room for us. We offered to let him share the room, but his orderly had made him up a bed elsewhere. The floor was littered with cast-off dressings, and in other ways was in a state of filth. We had to endure it as best we might.

"Do you mean to say that you actually slept in those filthy 'hans'?" a lady, well acquainted with Montenegro, remarked to me subsequently when I repeated the above incident. "I make a point of never setting foot inside them."

The answer was simple. Her experience of Montenegro had been confined to the summer; she had not crossed the Black Mountains in mid-winter with a famishing army.

Our host was not contented with his thirty peppers, but wanted twenty more for forage for Pigeon and for a little food which he had provided for us. He got ten—and it was not blessings which he showered upon us when we took our departure.

Rain and stones and mud marked our progress

next day until we came near to Podgoritza. I can remember how, towards the end, the rocks in the river bed took on fantastic shapes—crocodiles, giant tortoises and such-like monsters; I think it was because our brains, too, were growing distorted with fatigue.

Most wearisome of all, perhaps, was the dreary walk across the plain when at last the mountains were left behind. There was a long straight road that seemed to extend for miles, and with no town in sight though people kept telling us that it was quite close. And it is a curious thing that, though it lies in the plain, Podgoritza, approached from this side, somehow contrives to hide itself until you are actually within it.

With some difficulty—by the kind assistance of our Staff friends and the prefect of the town—we obtained a very nice room at Podgoritza in the house of pleasant people who were anxious to do all they could for us. And we were allowed three days in which to rest and recoup. It seemed wonderful to have come to some sort of civilization once more.

Not that we found Podgoritza a pleasing town. It is the largest and most important in Montenegro, but I cannot imagine it attractive even in normal times. Its houses and streets remind one of Nish, but there is little colour about them—perhaps it was all eclipsed by the grey that had stolen in with the famishing Serbian soldiers.

The only shops that seemed to be open were dry goods stores—and these were numberless.

How they all manage to make a living is a mystery, for any one is exactly like the others.

The Montenegrin, as we saw him here, is a fine specimen of humanity, a born fighting man. The number of pistols and knives that he will carry stuck in his belt over his gorgeous red and gold waistcoat is quite remarkable—he will use them, too, on very little provocation. Human life here is held cheap—not quite so much so as in Albania, still it is not thought much of. The punishment for murder is usually left to the hands of the murdered man's relatives, and so vendettas are common. The present king has worked hard to introduce methods of civilization, but in so wild a country it is next to impossible to uproot tradition. The one thing that will bring the men together is war, and it must always remain to the unforgettable credit of this little nation that it alone of all the Balkan peoples was able to withstand the Turk.

The men wear wonderfully ornate clothes, and always the little round cap that bears the monogram of the King worked upon its upper surface; the women, as far as I could judge, are not so keen upon their national dress. But then women count for very little in Montenegro. I may be wrong, but I doubt if the Montenegrin natives accorded a particularly cordial reception to the units of British nurses that found their way into the country.

For myself, the principal impressions of Podgoritza that I carried away with me were of the

little caves in the deep river bed where crowds of houseless refugees thronged and suffered and died; of the hideous slaughter-house, reeking with blood, situated by the bridge right in the middle of the town where every one must see it; and of the great difficulty we had in obtaining food of any sort, and the high prices we paid for the little we got. This was certainly not the fault of our kind hostess; she charged us no more than she had paid herself.

It was while we were at Podgoritza that we learnt that Scutari could no longer be regarded as a safe refuge for the army. Where were they to go? Nobody knew, but it was clear that we were all going to be driven to the very edge of the sea—to a coast that, rumour already had it, was closely guarded by enemy ships.

The rain poured down ceaselessly. On the morning of our departure, about six o'clock, we had thunder and lightning as a pleasing variety. We were packed into an open cart with about a dozen other people and driven to Plavnitza, which is a village on the lake, where we were supposed to find a steamer that would take us to Scutari. The Staff had left the day before on a special boat, an arrangement that was convenient for us as they would reserve us an apartment in the town. We did not anticipate a journey of more than twelve hours.

But things did not turn out quite as we had expected. We got down at Plavnitza village, soaked to the skin, and then found we had a

twenty minutes' walk along a rough embankment, ankle deep in mud, to the quay. A very high wind had got up in the meanwhile which cut us to the bone as we struggled against it, and when at last we reached the quay it was to learn that the boat had not come in and that, owing to the storm, it was very unlikely to appear at all. After a miserable interval of several hours we were informed for certain that it would not.

This was a real catastrophe—all the more so as it was quite within the realms of possibility that the storm might continue for several days. There was no road to Scutari, only a rough route by mountain paths which it would take days to negotiate, and though there were small boats, none of them would venture out in such a gale—it would have been suicidal. To return to Podgoritza was a course that we refused to contemplate.

There were many people in the same plight as ourselves, but when it became a matter of certainty that the steamer was not going to show up they returned to the village and sought accommodation for the night there—no doubt a large number were disappointed.

For ourselves, we stayed where we were—on the quay. We had found shelter of a kind, and we were not disposed to give it up to some one else on the remote chance that after ploughing our way through the mud again we might find something better at the village.

There was only one building on the quay, a



A Serbian Camp

storehouse for goods delivered by the steamer. Just now there was nothing doing, and the doors were locked. There was, however, a small room, with a dirty narrow bed in it; it was occupied generally by the watchman, but he happened to be absent that night; he had left his son in charge, a sickly, pale-faced boy of fourteen or fifteen, who never ceased smoking cigarettes, and who had the manners and the conversation of a grown man.

It was in this room that a crowd of us had sought refuge from the storm, and here, when most of the others took their departure, we elected to remain. Our small host was very kind—he gave up his bed to us—but it was quite beyond his power to make the general conditions anything but disgusting in the extreme. We shiver still at the recollection of them.

Our young friend had been lavish in his hospitality and so we shared the room with some half-dozen men — excellent fellows, but whose habits could hardly commend them as companions for the night. The fact that there was a lady in the party made no difference to them at all.

Oh, the atmosphere of that room! It was redolent of stale fish, cigarette smoke, and the smell of foul garments soddened with rain. The storm that raged outside made it quite impossible to open door or window.

It was very cold, and we, like the rest, had been drenched through—but of course we could

not think of removing any of our wet clothes. We were faint for want of food, too. Expecting to reach Scutari that night we had brought but little with us, and that we had consumed at midday. But in that fetid atmosphere we could not have eaten much however richly supplied we might have been.

Our little host sat on a box and smoked and talked with his other guests for the best part of the night. It was the same with them all—when they were not smoking and spitting they were eating dried fish and cheese, the odour of which was sickening to sensitive nostrils.

The boy was barefooted and his clothes hung about his wizened deformed body in rags. They were palpably verminous, and, knowing this, we shuddered for the bed upon which we lay. Nevertheless, the poor little fellow was so cold when at last, like the rest of the company, he stretched himself out on the filthy floor to sleep, that we were impelled to give him one of our coverings, ill as we could spare it.

We had but a small fragment of candle, which spluttered to its end somewhere in the early hours of the morning. After that we lay, sleepless, in total darkness, listening to the moaning of the wind outside and the contented, unconcerned snoring of our companions. And there was a great fear upon us—it was that the coming of day might not bring us relief.

Luckily, however, our fears were without foundation. The morning dawned bright and

fine and the gale had abated. We were very hungry, but had to content ourselves with a little bread and margarine—how we thanked our stars for that margarine, which was still holding out! We were so stiff, too, from sleeping in our wet clothes that we could scarcely move.

It hardly seems credible that we should have been envied our accommodation that night—yet such is the fact. Days afterwards, at Scutari, our friend M. Brabatz coming to visit us was stopped by an acquaintance in the street and asked where he was going. He mentioned our name.

"Oh, those are the lucky people who did so well for themselves at Plavnitza," was the grudging comment.

The remark was serious—not spoken sarcastically. And I can quite understand it if the speaker had been at Plavnitza that night and failed to find any accommodation at all. It would have been ill to spend the night outside in the storm that was raging; how many had to do so one shudders to think.

The steamer came in about seven o'clock—just as we were making arrangements to hire a rowing-boat. These craft are long and narrow, and will hold about thirty passengers; one man refused to take less than twelve, and we were trying to make up that number when the steamer appeared. It was a relief, for eight or nine hours on the lake in an open boat was not altogether an attractive prospect. One or two

boatloads had already started, and I have an idea that they did not enjoy themselves.

We did not get off till one o'clock, and we were packed so tightly on board that it was almost impossible to move. A great many people were left behind—poor refugees—and it was pitiful to witness their appeals and protestations. On the other hand, I talked with a man, a Greek, who had arrived by the steamer and who was loud in his declarations that it was absurd for any one—certainly for ladies—to go to Scutari at all. The conditions there, according to him, were terrible, and people were starving in the streets. For himself he was returning to Podgoritza and thence to Nikshich, where things were better, and he advised others to do the same.

It was all very well for him, a Greek and a neutral, but very different for us. We had no intention of allowing ourselves to be taken if we could help it, and that would certainly be our fate at Nikshich. We knew by now that the Austrians proposed to sweep Montenegro while the Bulgars forced their way across Albania to Durazzo. Famine or no famine, we must go on.

We had a belated unit of English nurses on board, and also Commander Ker and his men. He had had a very rough time of it since leaving Prishtina; one of his men was ill on deck, and he himself was looking tired and worn. He had had very little sleep for days, so we got him down to the cabin, dosed him with aspirin, and made him as comfortable as we could.

We were lucky to have that cabin, as the day turned very cold. It was not a private one, but as we, with a Serbian officer and his wife, were the first on board, the ladies were able to secure the two bunks which it contained. So they, too, were able to get some much-needed sleep.

We lunched off some fish which the Serbian officer had purchased. It was perfectly wonderful to watch the fishermen and see the hauls that they would pull up with every throw of the net. I never saw fish caught in such abundance. It was the simplest job in the world—a contrast to the dynamite method employed in the rivers, where the fish are driven by an explosion to the surface and then netted.

I purchased a large supply for three peppers, and we decided that we would have a banquet later in the afternoon. We invited several hungry people, and when the time came we waited—but no luscious cooked fish appeared. I had entrusted them to Chirovitch with definite instructions—and I can only imagine that he succumbed to his own appetite. Of course he blamed the "cook," who was really one of M. Brabatz's chauffeurs (and the cook, I regret to say, made statements which seemed to incriminate the English nurses), but the result was that of the large supply I had purchased, only eight very tiny fish eventually materialized. And we were quite as many people waiting expectantly for supper!

It is quite possible that in summer sunshine the lake of Scutari may have its attraction; to

me it seemed nothing but a large sheet of water in a stony wilderness—for there was no change in the general character of the scenery; on either side the mountains rose, tier upon tier, like waves of the sea suddenly caught and petrified, and they had no vestige of vegetation, they were nothing but masses of piled stones, cruel, pitiless, and threatening. There was hardly a trace of human habitation to be seen, though I can remember one village standing utterly desolate at the foot of a precipitous mass of rock, shut off by other similar masses on either side and by the lake in front, without possibility of road or communication with the world except by boat, and wondering vaguely what sort of people could exist in such a spot.

It was dark when we reached Scutari, very tired and very hungry. We were deposited, with our belongings, upon the quay—landing from little boats—and then learnt that this was Scutari "Bazaar," and that it was a good half-hour's walk to the town. Of course there wasn't such a thing as a carriage, so we had to pluck up our courage, find porters for our things, and set out on foot. Our first task was to find our friends of the Staff, and since they had only arrived the day before nobody knew where they were to be found.

We located them at last in the "Konak"—a large, ugly edifice that was used for all manner of administrative purposes, and it was a relief to hear from Captain Gwozditch that he had

engaged a room for us; he had done so with considerable difficulty, and he confirmed what we had already heard of the terrible conditions prevailing in the town. He dispatched an orderly to see about the room while we waited upon the steps of the "Konak"; there was nowhere where we could go and rest. The Staff were all wretchedly lodged within the building.

The soldier came back and announced that the room had been let over our heads. We must find another, and at that time of night it would be difficult. Luckily the prefect of the town was still in the building, and to him we appealed. He was kindness personified, and after a time which seemed interminable, tired out as we were, a soldier conducted us through long narrow streets to the house of some Catholic Albanians who were quite Turkish in appearance and manner of living. They had a room to offer us, and we were glad to accept it whatever it might be.

Captain Gwozditch's orderly produced a tin of corned beef, some bread, and a bottle of rum, and we sat round a wood fire in the kitchen—the fire was, as usual, on a broad hearth in the middle of the room—to discuss a supper of which we stood badly in need.

And after supper we retired to bed—on the floor.

CHAPTER XIV

SCUTARI

Of the three weeks that we spent at Scutari I could write lightly as far as our own troubles are concerned—real enough as they were at the time, memory is usually ready with a gloss of humour to tone down colours that may be over crude—but lightness of pen is not possible in face of the great tragedy that was playing itself out daily—hourly—around us. One could not venture out into the streets of the city without realizing it on every side, and if one stayed at home, if one shut oneself up from the world without, there was still something in the very atmosphere one breathed that carried with it the nausea of human pain. I know, at least, that that is how Alice felt, and yet for the whole three weeks she hardly ever set foot out of doors.

She was worn out with fatigue—ill. It was well that we had reached a spot where she could take her rest—such as it was. Unfortunately circumstances were not conducive to the real health-giving rest which is what she needed.

Sleeping in a made-up bed upon the floor is not comfortable to begin with. It is very hard and apt to give pain to one's limbs, especially if

one stays in bed all day with the main object of keeping warm. Our room had no stove or fire, and some days were very cold and wet. We overcame the difficulty at last by procuring a brazier and burning charcoal—how we managed to escape suffocation I do not know. Every one who came to see us used to lecture us severely—but the room had to be heated somehow. As it was, our brazier was by no means a cheap amusement—it used to cost us at least ten francs a day. However, wood would have been just as expensive if we had had a stove. There was a garden with a wooden railing round it in the centre of the town, but it was not long before every vestige of the railing disappeared.

Food, of course, was the next difficulty we had to contend with. We were better off than most people, for my position enabled me to get a military order for bread—and it was largely the lack of bread that was playing such havoc among the Serbian soldiers. It is not meat they desire—they care little for meat—it is bread they crave for and must have—or die.

For the civilian, black bread or bread of the unpalatable maize was all that was procurable, and very heavy prices—as much as twelve francs a loaf—had to be paid for that. I could quote higher prices. I have heard of a hungry officer—in Montenegro—paying twenty-eight francs for a quarter of a loaf.

Ox-meat was procurable, and very little else except at extravagant and impossible rates. We

obtained an order to join the *ménage* of the principal hotel, and for a fortnight we partook of a menu that never varied in the smallest respect. Here it is: For midday dinner we had a thin soup with rice in it; then chunks of boiled beef with a few—a very few—haricot beans; then another dish of beef, differently cooked but always in heavy chunks, with a salad of white cabbage. For supper the latter dish was repeated. That was all. Bread was not provided. Wine of sorts was obtainable in the town, but the hotel possessed none.

After a fortnight of this one loathed the very sight of food. I used to find some amusement, however, in poking about the town and picking up anything I could find in the way of eatables. Spanish onions were an occasional luxury, and there were some little dried fish, like sardines, that we used to cook over our brazier now and then. We did quite a lot of amateur cooking, one way or another, on our brazier, both at Scutari and afterwards at Liesh. Our greatest talent was invariably exercised if eggs happened, by a stroke of luck, to be obtainable.

We managed to get hold of some sardines and tinned meats at Scutari. If you went into a shop and asked for anything of the sort you would certainly be told that there was none, but in all probability the shopkeeper had a store hidden away in his cellar. The natives had profited by their lesson of a year or two ago when the town was besieged by the Montenegrins

and famine conditions were very severe; they were determined not to go hungry again, and therefore kept themselves provided against the contingency. However, the big profits to be made upon their goods often tempted the people to produce them. So it was with a little tradesman named Antonio, with whom we had much dealing and who robbed us so cheerfully and straightforwardly that I am almost disposed to describe him as an honest man.

For, after all, he only took advantage of the conditions that prevailed, and these, from the financial point of view, were extraordinary. I need not say that they were prejudicial to every one except the native of Albania. The essential point was that the Albanian refused to deal with you unless you could pay him in silver or gold—and, naturally, silver and gold were commodities which you were not in the least likely to possess.

He did not much mind what the silver and gold might be—French, Italian, Turkish, Austrian, or even the Serbian silver dinar; what he did bar was the Serbian ten dinar bills and the Montenegrin peppers, which was exactly the kind of money that we all possessed.

The scorn of the pepper must have been somewhat galling to the Montenegrin authorities—it will, of course, be remembered that at this time Montenegro was occupying Scutari, an Albanian town, very much against the will of the native—and accordingly, to put things right, they issued

an edict that the dinar bills and the peppers were to be accepted as ordinary currency.

This edict, however, did not worry the wily Albanian in the least. He was quite willing to accept the dinars and the peppers—only he tripled his prices for any one who wished to pay him with that sort of money.

How exasperating this was to the customer may be imagined. To know that a thing can be bought for, say, three francs and to have to pay nine for it seems utterly absurd, and yet that is what we all had to submit to at Scutari.

If it had only been possible to procure the necessary gold and silver! But it wasn't. I had a long talk with the manager of the Bank of Montenegro and found him ready to wring his hands in despair. "I was here all through the siege," he declared, "and things were not half as bad then as they are now."

The Franco-Serbian Bank was better off. Through the friendly offices of the Minister of Finance they kindly consented to let me have twelve napoleons and a half — subsequently another six—and with these we were better off than most—but, all the same, we had to hoard the gold for we were warned that things might be ever so much worse when we were obliged to move on.

The Franco-Serbian Bank was installed at Scutari in a single small bedroom and was open for business for one hour daily; it was a remark-

able contrast to the palatial premises we had known at Skoplje.

The napoleon represented a good deal more than its face value; twenty-eight to thirty francs was the exchange one might receive for it. I don't know what would have been given for the pound sterling; at Skoplje, before the Bulgarian attack, we used to get as much as thirty-three dinars. I fancy, however, that in Albania, through ignorance of its value, the native—outside Scutari—would not have given more than twenty-five francs.

It was quite true that later on, at other places, financial conditions were far worse. At Liesh the silver dinar had no more value than the paper money, and they had a nasty trick of making you pay for everything they could in gold or its equivalent in silver—thus gaining the advantage of the exchange. We were charged half a napoleon, gold, per night for our room; this meant fifteen francs silver, or *forty-five dinars* if we had found ourselves compelled to pay for that luxurious apartment in Serbian money!

It is not only among the mountains that the Albanian brigand exercises his trade!

The financial situation caused a lot of minor difficulties in the town. There was, for instance, plenty of coffee to be had, but no hotel or café would serve you with a cup. The reason was that there was very little small change available, and that people who paid with a dinar expected to get eighty centimes back—the price for the

coffee being twenty. As this could not be done, coffee and *consommations* generally were declared off, and all the cafés practically closed their doors.

I have mentioned Antonio. He did a roaring trade with those who knew of those hoarded stores of his, and I cannot blame him for profiting to the full by conditions which were not of his contriving. I know that he worked with a will to assist the British Adriatic Mission in the distribution of goods.

It was at Scutari that I first came across this excellent mission that did so much for the Serbian refugees in the latter part of the retreat. But here again, as with so many other things, the burden of the song was: "Too late."

The Adriatic Mission, not quite certain just then whether it belonged to the Serbian Relief Fund or whether it was altogether a Government institution, was busily engaged organizing itself while the Serbian armies were plodding, hungry and worn, through the snow of Montenegro and Albania; it was in fine working order, able to cope with all possible emergencies, by the time they were on their way to Durazzo; and now, at the time I write these lines, it appears disposed to give up the ghost and hand over its field of energies to the French, who will begin the work all over again according to their own lights.

And yet it is impossible to speak too highly both of the individual workers and of the work they accomplished when they had the means at

their disposition. The help afforded by the road-makers between Liesh and Durazzo was of inestimable value, and must have saved hundreds of lives. Also it must not be forgotten that while stores accumulated in great quantities at Brindisi, great difficulty was experienced at first in the transport to Albania. Several attempts met with disaster, and the goods so urgently needed were lost. And so the mine-sweepers had to get to work before regular shipments could be made, and this of course caused a delay for which the mission can hardly be blamed. At the same time the inevitable "red tape" certainly played its part.

One can imagine the proceedings — purely imaginary, of course. A consignment of forage is asked for—urgently needed. Instead of the delivery of the forage an endless correspondence ensues. The application is referred from one department to another—it passes through numberless hands and is finally referred back to the first one. There it is comfortably pigeon-holed until a more urgent request comes in, when the whole process is gone through once more. It is by no means a simple matter for our powers that be to send out a consignment of anything anywhere—but hardest of all to Serbia. Consider the difficulties in the way: there are the feelings of so many people to be considered for one thing —why, the goods must be sent by way of Italy! Perhaps when, after long delay, they are actually received it is with special instructions that

Italian susceptibilities are by no means to be ruffled. And the very next day there may come a peremptory demand to know why the receipt of the consignment has not yet been acknowledged.

But meanwhile the unfortunate beasts for which the forage was required have long since ceased to be—fallen, perhaps, by the roadside to feed the wolves and the eagles.

During the first week of our stay at Scutari I paid a visit to the offices of the Adriatic Mission to inquire as to the condition of the refugees. I was told that I should be given all the information available as soon as stores had come to hand and the work was begun; at present it had not dealt with any refugees at all. And it was pitiful to hear this and then to glance out of the window at the sad procession that trailed up and down the street—gaunt, haggard, grey—an army of shadows.

Luckily it was not long after that that the much-needed stores did begin to arrive, and then there was no delay over their distribution. It is good to note also that relief was granted to all applicants at once—without troublesome formalities. It was just a case of feeding the hungry, and nobody appealed in vain.

It was sad, very sad, to walk the streets of Scutari in those days. The town seethed—literally seethed—with troops, and half of them had the air of dying men. The terrible march, the privations, the hunger—the hunger that

endured still—had proved too much even for these hardy fellows. They died like flies in their various camps; they fell dying in the streets; they reeled like drunkards up and down the city —for the cup from which they had been drinking was as bitter as the waters of Marah.

"How many men do you lose a day in the hospitals?" I asked an overworked doctor. He told me that fifty might be reckoned an average —sometimes it was much more than that.

And all the while we had no sense of security. The "haven of refuge" had utterly belied its promise. Every day we were subjected to the attack of enemy aeroplanes. Their arrival would be heralded by the ringing of church bells—one never knew for certain if it was a call to prayer or a warning of danger until the point was decided by the frenzied closing of shutters and the scuttling of the natives towards the lake— the open ground beside it was considered a safe spot, and there were many who would spend the whole day there. We grew quite accustomed to bombs in those days.

I had a narrow escape on the occasion of the most successful of these attacks. I was going to the "Konak" on rather important business, and therefore did not delay although I knew our daily visitor was hovering about. Luckily I was just a minute or two behind time; five minutes earlier and I should have been on the steps of the "Konak" when a bomb fell close by, killing several men and horses and shattering every

window in the building. Three or four French soldiers were killed or injured on that occasion; one of the latter was brought in subsequently to Liesh; he was nearly blind and had no less than thirty wounds about his body.

A house close by was utterly destroyed by the fall of another bomb.

We knew, too, that it was not only chance bombs from aeroplanes that we had to fear. The Austrians were making a vigorous attack upon Montenegro. Cettinje was threatened; it was rumoured that the outer defences of the supposed impregnable Mount Lovchen had already fallen. And Cettinje taken, a clear way was laid open to Podgoritza—and Scutari.

Nor was it very much better on the coast. The Adriatic, it appeared, was teeming with enemy submarines. It was hopeless to think of getting taken over to Brindisi, for there were no passenger boats—or practically none.

"The women of the 'missions' and the old men have been allowed through by Austria—but no one else." So I was told one day, my informant being the same English officer who, at Prizren, had depreciated the fighting power of the Serbs.

"I call it perfectly disgraceful," I exclaimed.

"What is disgraceful?" he asked sharply.

"Why, that we—the Allies—should be compelled to ask Austria's permission for anything. In heaven's name, what are we about?"

That is what I wanted to know just then more than anything else in the world. What had we

been about to allow things to get into such a desperate state? The supposed catastrophe to our arms which had haunted one like a nightmare all through the retreat had no foundation in fact, I knew that now; our sea-power was unimpaired; our army was steadily growing. How was I to explain to my Serbian friends that England had to rely upon the permission of Austria for the transport of her subjects? I hated to have to make that avowal—with the loss of prestige that it implied.

The charitable permission of Austria! And yet my English friend resented my use of the word "disgraceful." I must admit that he was mollified when he understood that I referred to the Allies generally.

As to the political situation between Italy and Serbia, the subject is far too intricate for any sort of discussion here. I may say, however, that it struck us as extraordinary—no doubt because of our ignorance of international happenings—that Italy, in her own avowed interests, should have taken no steps to protect the coast-line of Albania. This was another of our miscalculations while we were cut off from all knowledge of what was happening outside; we had thought it more than likely that we should find a strong force of the Allies—as represented by Italy—in occupation of Scutari.

It was on our own Christmas Day that things, as far as we ourselves were concerned, looked at their blackest. Alice threatened to be really ill

—the horrors and the discomforts among which we were living were getting severely upon her nerves, and something fresh had just happened to put them to still further test.

The brother of our host, a priest, had somehow contrived to fall off his horse into the river and had been drowned. They brought his body to the house and it was laid out in the room adjoining ours. And then commenced the observance of a national custom which to us was trying in the extreme. The relatives assembled round the body and wailed—and it was not only the relatives, for all the friends of the deceased —and I think that must have meant all the inhabitants of Scutari—were obliged by etiquette to pay formal visit and join in the melancholy chorus. It went on morning, afternoon, and night—the whole night long—nor did it cease even when the body had been removed for burial.

We would watch from our window the mourners arriving. The women all wore the heavy red hoods which fall on either side of the face, something after the fashion of an Egyptian mummy except that the ends are crossed over the breast. We would know they were coming because they began their wailing, in a minor key, before they reached the house; it went on increasing and reached its highest pitch when the door was opened to them by the bereaved family. They were not satisfied with the veranda and other rooms of the house, they also invaded our



A Montenegrin Christening

apartment, and I rather fancy we were expected to lift our voices and wail as well. Imagine what this must have been to harassed nerves.

The habit of wailing is common in the Balkans. We had already come across it at Mladenovatz, for there was a cemetery near our camp, and every Sunday morning I used to listen to the wailing over the graves. Many people collect for this purpose, and they take food with them, which they discuss heartily in the midst of their lamentations; they do not mind the presence of strangers, and if you should join one of the parties they will invite you to share the repast. It often happens that the lament takes the form of a metrical outburst, quite spontaneous, and containing rough poetical ideas by no means without merit.

I was feeling very depressed that Christmas Day, and the idea came to me to attend Mass at the cathedral—of which there are two at Scutari. The Albanians of this town are mostly of the Catholic faith though their habits of life are very Turkish. Perhaps I hoped to hear some good singing as a relief to the wailing—anyway, it was a long while since I had set foot within a church.

But I was too late for Mass. The great church was empty. Nevertheless I went and stood for a few minutes in front of the high altar, and the very peace and quiet of the place came as an ineffable relief to me. I went away at last, telling myself that things might not really be as bad as I was painting them.

And it was that very afternoon that a measure of brighter things set in. The landlord of the hotel came to me and said that if we wanted to leave our present lodging—if we wanted to!—he knew of a lady who would be willing to lend us her house, with three servants, for as long as we pleased, and there would be nothing whatever to pay. (We were not supposed to be paying where we were, the room having been "requisitioned" for our benefit, but we had agreed on a voluntary rent.)

I went to look at the house, and when I saw carpeted floors, curtains, upholstered sofas and chairs, a piano, and, above all, two handsome French bedsteads, I could hardly believe that I was not dreaming. We took possession that same evening and enjoyed considerable comfort for the rest of our stay at Scutari.

I am afraid I cannot assert that it was wholly in the spirit of sympathy that the owner of that house vacated it on our account; there were one or two very good reasons for her action.

In the first place the house might have been "requisitioned" by the Montenegrin authorities, and the pretty things it contained roughly treated by unwelcome guests; with us our hostess felt she was safe. Then the house was situated just behind the "Konak," directly within the usual line of attack of the enemy aeroplanes—the building that had been utterly destroyed was only two or three doors off. This was certainly an objection, but it didn't count for much with

us in comparison to the advantage of sleeping in beds once more.

There was a third and rather peculiar reason for our hostess's considerations. When the Montenegrins occupied Scutari they promptly secured the persons of several prominent citizens, partly because they were suspected of carrying on a propaganda in favour of Austria and partly in order to assure the good behaviour of the townsfolk generally. Among these was the son of our hostess. He had been sent away from the town and was kept in easy confinement at Podgoritza. Since then his mother had been moving heaven and earth to obtain his release; she had even sent a petition to the Crown Prince.

She imagined that I might be of service to her in this matter owing to my position as an Englishman and a Serbian officer. She knew that I had means of approaching the highest Montenegrin authorities in the town. There was one of these particularly, General Wechowitch, whom she imagined had but to speak the word and her son would be restored to her. And so she wanted me to interview General Wechowitch on her behalf.

I promised to do so and I kept my word, although I hadn't the smallest hope that her request would be granted. Possibly it was all for the best that it should not be. I was told politely that the matter was already "under consideration." As Podgoritza fell not very long afterwards it is probable that the Scutari hostages

obtained their release owing to the necessity of flight.

It was rather pathetic, however, to witness the mother's deep concern for her son. There was one day when she was nearly beside herself. News had come through that there was no food at Podgoritza. That afternoon our servants were kept busy packing comestibles of all available sorts. I should think it is very doubtful if they ever reached their destination safely.

Another of our troubles was surmounted almost at the same time as that of our lodging. We obtained eatable food. The Minister of War kindly allowed us to be attached to his *ménage*, and this was conducted by an officer who was a regular *cordon bleu*! To him I feel eternally grateful, for we had reached a stage when the very sight of our daily meals sickened us. How he contrived to vary his menus—as he did—with the prevailing lack of material is a puzzle that I cannot attempt to solve. I expect he made use of tinned things from the army stores—but this is mere supposition. Anyhow we were now well fed as well as comfortably lodged.

All our friends used to assemble and stand in silent wonder and admiration at the magnificence of our apartment. Once more we were envied our luck. It was again our lot to occupy "the finest room in the town."

We did not occupy it for very long. The French had now come upon the scene and were taking up the question of the eventual disposition

of the Serbian army. All sorts of rumours began to circulate as to where they were to be shipped to. One of the Ægean islands: Corsica—Tunis —Corfu. When we left Scutari it was in the belief that Bizerta would be our destination. I had made an application, favoured by the Minister of War, that we might be allowed to accompany the army wherever they went; but this was eventually vetoed by the "Grand Quartier Général"—as far as Alice was concerned. She might go to Corsica if she chose—that was where all the women were being sent, but no Serbian officer might take his wife with him into the land of exile; that was an absolute rule, and no exception could possibly be made. Under these circumstances it became obvious that Alice and I must either consent to the suggested course—separation—or we must endeavour to get transported to Brindisi—apparently a matter of considerable difficulty and danger—severing our connection for the time being with the Serbian army. We decided to let the decision stand over and see how matters would turn out.

Accordingly, when the Second Army received its instructions to proceed to Liesh we also prepared for departure. Our friends upon the Staff were under the impression that there would be hardly any delay before the army was transhipped to its ultimate destination now that the Allies had evidently made up their minds to act. The long pilgrimage had really and truly entered upon its

last stage—the end of the Via Dolorosa was in sight.

"The army will embark at San Giovanni di Medua," that is what we were told with the utmost confidence, "and will proceed in small vessels to Durazzo or Valona—possibly Brindisi—where it will be transferred to the transports that will convey it to Tunis or whatever the place may be. There's no doubt whatever as to that."

The spirit of confidence revived—at any rate among the officers. Possibly it did among the men also, but I think they were already too broken in body and spirit to understand or care. Relief was coming through certainly—the Adriatic Mission was getting into its stride—the state of affairs upon the coast was evidently better than it had been—but, for myself, at the bottom of my heart, I had a great fear. What if it should prove impossible to take off so many men from Medua? The only alternative seemed almost unthinkable. A march down the coast to Durazzo—five days at the least—through a country the terrors of which had already been depicted to me—if such a fate were in store for men who were still wrestling with the spectres of hunger and disease, then indeed there would be a climax to the great tragedy which might well make the whole world shudder.

And yet how easily such a climax might eventuate! The embarkation of so many men from a tiny little port like Medua, under the conditions that prevailed, would demand time—and it was

not likely that the Austrians would delay their advance. Once Cettinje fallen there was little to keep them back—they would descend on Antivari —and there were the Bulgarians already threatening Elbasan, the key to Durazzo. Once more, with the promise of speedy safety expressed on all sides, the old haunting sense returned of being caught like a rat in a trap.

When we first reached Scutari we were advised, in spite of the danger of transport, to get out of the country as quickly as we could. The only way to do so was to proceed to San Giovanni di Medua and wait there for a boat that would take us off. In the same breath we were told that the conditions at Medua—which is an hour from Liesh and a two days' journey from Scutari—were about as terrible as they could be. The place was only a village of a few houses, several of which had already been destroyed by enemy bombardment or aeroplane attack, the latter of which was of daily occurrence; the harbour was blocked by wreckage of ships which had been sunk as they essayed to enter port with the urgently needed stores; thousands of refugees, houseless, foodless, sick, and despairing, were crowding the hill-side waiting in silent misery in the hope of being carried to safety, the hope that day by day was doomed to disappointment. The scene upon the quay when a boat was actually leaving beggars description—people fought among themselves—women sobbed and fainted—children were crushed.

I am not describing this from hearsay, I have seen it for myself.

But, knowing of these things, is it to be wondered at that we elected to stay with the army at Scutari? The advice given to us by Captain Gwozditch many weeks ago at Pirot—it seemed a century—to remain with the Staff for our own sake as well as for that of our work, had amply proved its value.

San Giovanni di Medua in the latter days of December was a place of horror; it was a little better later on when the Adriatic Mission got to work, but even they could not be expected to cope satisfactorily with so tremendous a task.

It must have been indescribably hard for gently nurtured women who had to spend days—perhaps weeks—in the hideous environment of Medua; such was the case, for instance, with the fiancée of M. Vikert and her mother, who had hardly stayed at Scutari at all and had got hung up indefinitely on the coast. He knew that they were there, but could get no further news about them, and was consumed with anxiety on their behalf. I inquired about them when we got to Liesh, and learnt that they were no longer at Medua, so I trust they got through all right.

All the English "missions" had escaped to Italy long ago—by Austrian consent, I suppose. Mrs. Stobart was one of the last to go. I fancy it must have been about the time when we first reached Scutari. With the exception of the British Consul, the various members of the

Adriatic Mission and ourselves, I should doubt if there were many English left in Albania or Montenegro by the end of December. I must not forget Admiral Troubridge and Commander Ker, who were working at Medua in connection with the transport.

We left Scutari early in the New Year.

CHAPTER XV

FROM SCUTARI TO LIESH

I HAVE said nothing about Scutari as a town for the reason that I made no effort to get acquainted with it. To me it was just like all the other places at which fate decreed that we must stay. There was no escape from the sombre grey of the teeming streets.

Under other conditions I can quite imagine that Scutari—or Scodar, to give it its more correct name—may be a charming place. I have heard of its roses, its violets, its beauty of spring and summer—but these things were not for us. It was indeed lucky that I had my work, otherwise I might have been in danger of falling into the state of mind which several people described to me as being theirs—they had, they said, no other feelings except as to what they should eat and how they should sleep—everything else was little but a blank mist.

I have often wondered why Scodar came to be called Scutari; perhaps, years ago, some confusion arose between it and the better known city on the Bosphorus. But all these towns have two names, and it is a little difficult to recognize Antivari as Bar, Alessio as Liesh, or Durazzo as Dratch.

We started on our two days' journey—it could be accomplished in one, but long and fatiguing—on the same day as the Staff, but later in the morning. Alice was riding Pigeon, and I had been provided with a horse, whilst we also had a Montenegrin gendarme to look after us and show us the way. We had our orderly too—a new one named Christopher, a native of Herzegovina who had been in Montenegrin service. We had got rid of Chirovitch, who was a rogue; Christopher was honest, but a fool and very much of a glutton. As we could never eat our trek-ox food at Scutari he profited by it, and was always overeating and being ill in consequence.

The road to Liesh is on the flat all the way, but extremely marshy in places and, after rain, very difficult in consequence. For a little while after leaving the town one skirts the lake under the brow of the hill on which stands the great ancient castle of Scutari. It is a vast structure and its walls are tremendously solid. I could gain little information about it, but fancy it may have been of Venetian construction. There is a legend about its building which tells—I cannot vouch for my version—of three brothers who were the chief masons and who were in despair because for one reason or another they found it impossible to complete their work. At last they were mysteriously told that they would never do so unless they should sacrifice, by building her up in the wall, the first woman who came to them on the following day.

Now they were all three married, and it was the habit of their wives to bring them their food at midday—so it was obvious that the first of the wives to appear the next day must be the one to suffer. They made a compact between themselves that they would say nothing to the women and abide by the result. But the two elder brothers broke their word and warned their wives, who consequently did not turn up. The youngest, however, had observed the compact, and so his young wife came as usual and was duly immured. After which the castle was completed.

The moral of the story is not quite clear, but there it is exactly as it was told to me.

We had arranged to spend the night at a village called Busatje, but when we arrived here it was to find that there was practically no village—little more than blackened broken walls. The place had been destroyed in the war of 1913 and no attempt had yet been made to rebuild it.

To burn down his house is the greatest penalty that can be inflicted upon an Albanian, to take away his gun the greatest indignity. He cares very little about his life.

We were passing now through a district where the Albanian nation had no love for the Serb, and which was therefore reckoned dangerous. I do not think, however, that the army in this part suffered at the hands of the Arnauts as it did on the Lhum-Kula route, along the River Drin—although whatever central rule there might be

there was in the hands of Essad Pasha, who has acted as a friend of the Allies.

As a matter of fact there is no central rule whatever in Albania. Each tribe has its own chief and practically governs itself. A king of Albania would find his task almost an impossible one; witness the Prince of Wied, who was made "Mpret" by crafty German instigation, and who was not able to maintain his position for many weeks. I have heard that he is at present lurking about somewhere behind the German lines waiting an opportunity to return. Should he do so he will probably not find his job any easier to-day than it was before.

We had heard many stories of the exploits of the Arnauts against the Serbs in Central Albania, and, situated as we were, they were hardly pleasant to reflect upon. Here is one—true, however difficult it may be to credit its reality in twentieth-century Europe.

Two brothers, one of whom was the Director of the Second Hospital at Nish, became accidentally detached from the division of the army that they were accompanying. They were in a very wild country and there was no definite path.

Alarmed, since dusk was near to fall, the Director climbed a little eminence close at hand with the object of ascertaining, if possible, the way that they should go. He left his brother, who was tired out, resting on the trunk of a fallen tree.

Suddenly he heard the sound of shouting

coming from the spot that he had left, and at the same time a familiar voice crying faintly for help. With a sickly fear at his heart he tore down the hill-side—but it was only to find the dead body of his brother, who had been shot from a distance by lurking Arnauts concealed among the trees.

For a few minutes they did not show themselves, but presently, realizing that they had nothing to fear, they emerged, and promptly threw themselves upon the Director, who was too grief-stricken at his brother's death to make any effort to defend himself.

He gave himself up for lost, but they did not harm him. They held him prisoner while they stripped the dead man of all that he had of value, and then they led their captive off to a house which was at least a mile and a half away.

It was a typical Albanian house—no more nor less than a little stronghold. You will find such houses in every village of the country. They are square-built, and their walls are of stone, solid and thick; there is hardly a window, but plenty of loopholes, which serve for purposes of defence in case of need; and at one of the angles there is a square tower so placed as to afford the most favourable look-out over the surrounding country. Should there happen to be any land a strong wall, if rough and rudimentary, always surrounds the whole property. The house of the Arnaut is wonderfully illustrative of the man.

It was to such a house that the Director was

conducted, and here, in an evil-smelling kitchen, warmed and lighted only by a wood fire that burned in the centre of it, his captors proceeded to rob him of his valuables.

He felt sure that they would murder him afterwards, since vainly, over and over again, he had appealed to them to grant him the "bessa." He tried again now, but with no avail: his pocket-book, his purse, his watch—they took all these, and then they came upon a gold medallion, which was of little real value except to himself, and were about to take that as well.

But against this he protested with all the strength that was in him. They might kill him, he declared, but he would not part with the medallion. He poured out insults upon them, the murderers of his brother; he was desperate and did not mind what he said.

They advanced upon him threateningly, and among them was a girl who, till now, had been sitting quietly before the fire. She was quite young and her dress was lavishly decorated with chains of silver and gold coins. Her hair, uncrimped, hung heavily over her ears and forehead after the manner of ancient Egypt. Her eyes were sombre and unfathomable.

Perhaps it was the sight of those coins, vaguely appreciated in the lurid glow of the fire, that inspired the Director to a sudden and uncalculated action. The fear of death upon him, he tore the medallion with its chain from his neck and stretched it out to the girl.

"I will give it to you," he cried.

The men paused and hesitated. Their knives were still unsheathed. The girl stepped forward and gravely took the trinket. Then she raised her head and for a moment their eyes met.

"I give you the 'bessa,'" she said softly.

The speech caused a commotion. Cries were raised, angry protestations. But the girl appeared quite unconcerned. She repeated her words and her lips parted in a slow smile as inscrutable as if it had been called up from the mist of forgotten time.

"I give you the 'bessa.'"

The words were spoken and the words were low. The Director knew that from that moment his life was safe.

And it was so. Knives were sheathed, his property was restored to him, food was brought and a rough bed was prepared for him in a corner by the fire. There, in that ominous kitchen, with the murderers of his brother, he spent the night. Worn out by fatigue and emotion he slept.

The next morning, at his request, they conducted him back to the spot where his brother lay and they helped him to inter the body. Then they directed him as to the path that he should pursue and solemnly bade him God-speed.

It must seem an astonishing fact to many that these savage, lawless people should profess the Roman Catholic faith. The girl who gave the Director the "bessa" wore a little silver cross

suspended about her neck—though it is hardly likely that she was animated by any Christian sentiment.

In this connection it is worth recording that a small band of brigands that held up a whole Serbian division, robbing them ruthlessly, was accompanied by a Catholic priest. But the protests of the Serbian commandant met with no sympathy on his part.

"It is the custom of the country," he said blandly.

The Arnauts had a good haul on that occasion. The Serbians were caught in a narrow defile, and the brigands, on the hills, could slaughter them at their leisure if they refused to come to terms. And those terms were formally made, drawn up on paper and signed.

They were harsh in the extreme. Every pack-horse with its burden had to be given up, the Albanian chief was to have the right of selecting fifteen of the officers' horses, and finally the officers themselves were to submit to being searched and having all their valuables taken from them.

And—since it was palpably impossible to put up a fight—these terms had to be accepted.

In this case, too, a certain amount of primitive consideration was shown. There were a number of wounded with the Serbians and, without horses, it was impossible to transport them farther. The Serbian commandant therefore requested that they might be allowed to remain where they

were, encamped and in charge of a doctor; also that the Arnauts should provide food for them till such time as fresh horses could be sent to their relief.

These conditions were agreed to and strictly observed. The only sufferer seems to have been the doctor who, wandering from the camp, fell into the hands of another tribe who stripped him of his valuables—besides nearly all his clothes.

We heard many details of the terrible journey by the Drin route from our friend Captain Popovitch, who had travelled that way. Especially he spoke of the terrors of the famous Vizier's Bridge, which has so precipitous an incline that, slippery as it was with a covering of ice, men and horses failed to negotiate it, but slid down and perished in the freezing waters below.

Poor Captain Popovitch arrived eventually at Liesh in a sad state of fatigue. He had made almost the whole journey on foot. This was owing to his kindness of heart. He had horses at his disposition, but he gave them away, one after the other, to a party of women refugees who were worn out and unable to walk another step.

Since we could not stop at Busatje we pushed on to another village—Barbaruchi. Here we found the Staff surrounded by a crowd of gesticulating Arnauts—more like fierce circus clowns than ever. Our friend, M. Brabatz, forced his way through to us.

"There's no accommodation to be had," he

said in his cheering way. "You mustn't think of trusting yourselves in one of these Arnaut houses. The Staff are all spending the night outside."

After the stories we had heard of Arnaut brigandage this was anything but encouraging. Nevertheless on this occasion, as explained, we were not alone. So we decided to risk it, and accepted the offer of an Arnaut to convey us to a house where we could spend the night. But we were inclined to regret our decision before we reached our destination.

It was right away from the village, as rough a quarter of an hour's ride as can be imagined—through hedges, up steep banks, and over broad ditches of mud. The house, surrounded by a strong wall, was a little fortress—very typical. It might well have been a brigand's stronghold, and perhaps it was under other owners, but to us the "House of the Three Weird Sisters," as we elected to name it, will always remain a pleasing and engrossing memory.

I do not know how many people lived in that house—they seemed to be numberless, but that I think was because the neighbours dropped in to have a look at us. Our hostesses were three elderly women whom we christened the "Weird Sisters" because they suggested witches as they crouched, hooded and fantastically clad, over the great wood fire that burnt in the centre of the room and which provided all the light we had.

If only some artist could have painted the

picture of that interior with the little company, some fifteen odd, that collected round the fire! There was such a startling diversity of type and of costume. There were the Serbian and Montenegrin uniforms, ourselves to represent the British element, and for the rest—well, it was easy to imagine that one had somehow strayed away from twentieth-century commonplace into some strange land of fantasy. Seen in the lurid firelight our companions appeared so unreal, so unlike anything one had ever seen before, that one hesitated almost to believe them human.

It was their ghostlike aspect in their white dresses, with the quaint lines of black embroidery that was mainly responsible for the illusion. But there was a good deal more that went to the picture. The steaming cauldron; the crouching together of the three sisters; the position occupied by the son-in-law, who acted as host, in a niche of the wall behind the hearth, where he looked like the figure of some pagan god; the children solemnly kneeling—we none of us had chairs—and hardly ever removing their eyes from our faces; the men, with their white felt caps on their half-shaven heads, sitting cross-legged, solemn and silent, except that now and again, by way of adding to the harmony of the proceedings, they would break into a low murmur of song—one of the innumerable refrains concerning the national hero, Skenderbeg. And there were long shadows that lost themselves in dark corners—eerie shadows. . . .

It was an experience worth having, this incursion into the land of the unreal. Nor did we return to the grim realities of life until the next day, when, having clambered back over hedge and ditch and bank, we resumed our places in the sad procession that still trod wearily the hopeless road of retreat—the grey, heartbreaking road that led to Liesh through dank sodden fields and malaria-haunted swamps.

The same hideous pictures—always the same. Dead and dying horses lay in the filthy ditches and all along the road—some in a ghastly state of decay; dying soldiers continued to drop out of the ranks; a terrible depression seemed to hang over the entire countryside; the breeze blew sick and tainted. All around was the spirit of death and decay.

It is difficult to write of these things—vivid though the picture may still be upon the brain. Those famished soldiers who lay dead by the roadside—perhaps they were better off now that the long suffering was over; we found what comfort we could in that reflection. Their bruised and naked feet had ceased to tread the cruel path of retreat. They lay in their torn and tattered uniforms, rigid and motionless, a frozen dignity ennobling their pinched features. They were the martyrs of the march.

Sometimes one had to assist at the last scene—that was more painful still. I recall one starving man—he lay awkwardly huddled together by the roadside. Some passer-by had

produced a little bread and his companions were trying to induce him to eat. But he couldn't swallow—he hadn't the strength—the bread stuck in his throat and he died—choking. . . .

I will cite another case. It did not happen to us, but to a friend who trod this same road a little later than we had done; the actual scene was just outside Liesh. The experience will stand as a ghastly but illuminative example.

Tired out from the long tramp our friend entered a barn where about a dozen soldiers were huddled together around a fire which they had succeeded in kindling, and wishing to rest for a little while he touched the shoulder of the nearest man and asked him to make room in front of the fire.

The man was leaning back against the low mud wall. He neither moved nor made any response. Our friend imagined at first that he was asleep, but he quickly learnt his mistake. The next man stirred and spoke.

"He's dead, that poor chap is. I don't know when he died. We carried him for the last few kilometres and brought him in here—but there's no food and there'll be more of us like him before the morning—perhaps already—I don't know."

He spoke with the callousness of utter despair—but what he said was true. Out of those dozen men four were dead—yet there they sat, side by side with the living who had not the energy nor the strength to remove their bodies

from the circle—nor even to ascertain if they had ceased to breathe.

These things are not the product of morbid imagination—they are true. And we write of them in order that our readers in England, in their quiet homes, may know something of the real horrors that accompanied the Serbian retreat, and realize that while we at home are still crying for recruits, more recruits—and needing them too—by our mistaken policy in dealing with the Balkan phase of the war we have sacrificed the lives of thousands of fine soldiers—perhaps the best infantry that Europe can show. And these lives have not been lost in real war; they have been squandered uselessly—frittered away; and let it not be forgotten that every man who laid himself down by the roadside and died represented a strong fighting unit on the side of the Allies—who made no use of him at all, who refused to let him fight yet failed to save him from death.

That afternoon we reached Liesh—tragic Liesh.

CHAPTER XVI

LIESH

THE Grand Hotel, Liesh, seems to merit a brief special description.

Perhaps it did not really aim at so grandiloquent a title. It bore no outward sign whatever proclaiming itself an inn, and the only explanation I could find for the name that had been bestowed upon it was the words "Grand Hotel," upside down, roughly painted upon a section of the matchboard by which the bedrooms were partitioned off from the stairs.

It was a stone building, two stories high. The lower one was little more than a barn which had been divided into two parts by a few advertisement-plastered boards and some old matting. The floor was precisely the same as the yard outside, rough stones and earth. A small bar had been set up in one of the sections, and a few shelves above it showed an array of empty bottles; for furniture there was a deal table and a bench—nothing more. The other section, windowless and dark, fulfilled many duties—more often than not it was a stable. There was a wooden table in it upon which Christopher made his bed. Upon a broken section of the stone

wall some French orderlies used to make a fire to cook on for their masters—a couple of officers who shared with us this delightful abode. The trouble was, since there was no chimney, that the smoke used to find its way through the large gaps in the boards to the rooms upstairs. Very often Christopher had companions for the night; horses or dogs or fowls or human refugees—for the last few days that we were at Liesh some six or eight wounded Frenchmen, including one who had been terribly hurt by a bomb at Scutari—slept in that dark hole, making up what beds they could with straw and sacking.

You ascended to the upper story by stairs that resembled a ladder. There were only four rooms, three on the front and one behind. Of the former we occupied one, the French officers another; the third was a tiny little cupboard where the landlord or his mother slept—I think they took it in turns. The room behind was the usual Albanian kitchen with a big hearth in the middle of the room.

Our apartment possessed no ceiling—one gazed up into the rafters of the roof. Rain dripped through pitilessly. The floor was carpetless and full of holes. The windows were broken and patched with paper. A wooden ledge encircled the room at about the height where the ceiling might have been; it was a playground for rats—the hugest I have ever seen.

We had two beds, reasonably comfortable and clean. A great luxury this; it was impressed

upon us that one of them had been slept in by King Peter. A table and a couple of chairs completed the furniture.

Despite all this we were still said to be occupying " the finest room in the town," and we paid, as I have already mentioned, half a napoleon, gold, per day for the accommodation.

The Staff were very badly off indeed. They were occupying a ruined building just outside the town, sleeping on the floor—anyhow—and with practically no shelter from the cold stormy weather that was prevailing just then.

The first night we imagined that we were doomed to fare no better. Eventually, however, the landlord of the Grand Hotel consented to evacuate his cupboard for our benefit. A bed was made up for us which practically occupied the whole room, but when we saw it we rejoiced, for it looked like a real bed.

Appearances, however, were deceptive. It was, in reality, no more than a few bedclothes spread on a table. But of course we had to make the best of it and pay our half-napoleon cheerfully. The next day we were able to move into the larger room.

We stayed at Liesh the best part of a fortnight, and they are days so full of tragic memories that it is painful to tell of them. In the Foreword to this book I have attempted to give some idea of our state of mind at this time, and I have no wish to repeat myself here.

It soon became known that Corfu was the

ultimate destination of the army, and it was abundantly evident, too, that the army could not be taken off from San Giovanni di Medua. Once more the promised goal had shifted; there was no course open to the unfortunate men but to drag their starved weary limbs—if they could—along the road to Durazzo, a road more difficult and dangerous, because of its swamps and unbridged rivers, even than that across the dreaded Mount Tchachak. And, indeed, this road was more fatal to them, more fatal by far, as we knew from reports that came in day by day.

We were well situated, at the Grand Hotel, to watch the working out of the tragedy in all its grim details. Beneath our windows was an open space, along the river bank, through which all the traffic going to Durazzo must necessarily pass. The hotel is placed quite at the entrance of the little town—almost the first house—and directly opposite it is the rickety wooden bridge that connects, on the other side of the river, with the road leading on the right to Scutari, on the left to San Giovanni di Medua.

So we had nothing to do but to sit at our window as if it were a box in some devil-devised theatre, and watch the sad players in this most tremendous drama of world history as they trooped across the stage that had been set for the final and most crucial act of the tragedy.

And no more fitting stage decoration could well have been designed. The foreground—that

open space by the river—was a halting-place, and it was there that the main action played itself out. The seat of such military authority as remained was close by, and there one might see gatherings of the most important men still left in the country—Serbian, French, English—and draw one's own conclusions from their bearing and demeanour; for every one came to Liesh as soon as Scutari was threatened—every one, from the highest to the lowest—all alike came, played their little parts and then moved on.

And from early morning till late at night the stage was crowded with a moving throng of lesser players, the "supers" of the great drama. One watched them approaching, the weary procession that we knew so well, along the Scutari road; at the bridge there would be a moment's halt while those that were riding would dismount—for it was not permitted to ride across the bridge—then they would advance, the jaded horsemen leading their jaded steeds, and all alike footsore and bent and haggard, their uniforms hanging in rags about them, their wasted limbs showing through the rents; many with naked feet because they had sold their boots for bread, leaving bloodstains behind them as they trod; many staggering from side to side, giddy and dazed and no longer master of themselves; many hobbling painfully, supported by the arms of more hardy companions, with death writ clear upon their wasted faces—and many no longer able to walk at all—carried anyhow, on a

friend's back, on a roughly constructed litter, or more often than not in a blanket held firmly by its ends. God help the poor fellows if it was their fate to be deposited at the Liesh " hospital " —and yet there was no choice between that and being left to die by the way.

Tramp—tramp—tramp—all day long and far into the night came the heartrending echo of footsteps on the wooden bridge, the footsteps of a phantom army pursuing a phantom goal. That phantom goal!—to me there was always the torturing reflection that perhaps many of these unfortunates who had struggled through thus far, with ineffable pain and suffering, believed the end at hand; how would it fare with them when they were told that the goal had shifted once more, that there was no rest as yet for their wounded feet, that they must drag on again to distant Durazzo?

The crowds that poured in from Scutari were soon augmented by troops of refugees who had renounced all hope of being taken off from San Giovanni di Medua. The two sections met and were united at the bridge. Well, too, we knew that Medua road, for it faced us, just across the river, winding under the crest of a low hill that cut off the view of the sea and formed the background of the picture, a fitting background with its masses of grey stone, amid which the grey uniforms of the encamped soldiers were hardly distinguishable, so that one was only vaguely aware of a constant movement, of a

teeming indefinable life—except when night fell, for then the whole slope was lurid with many fires.

The river flowed sluggishly beneath the wooden piers of the bridge—a foul stream now, bearing a burden of corruption to the sea. The eyes found no rest here, for whichever way they might turn they would light on some dead thing lying half in and half out of the water. It was well when the river swelled after heavy rain and swallowed them up.

And daily from our window we witnessed scenes that made the heart bleed. Here, in the space below, the crowd would collect and make piteous appeals for bread which could not be given them; here the weary soldiers would throw themselves down to snatch a few minutes' rest—it was often difficult to tell whether they were living or dead; here summary justice—necessary even at such a time—used to be meted out; it took the form of whipping, or rather of a few blows inflicted with a heavy stick, and was never very severe as far as I could observe, though the cries of the victims used to jar us painfully at times.

Then there were the horses tethered in the yard beneath us. The poor brutes were always so hungry, and one knew it from their constant restless movements—day and night. But forage was a terrible difficulty in those days, and the price demanded for it was extortionate in the extreme.

Poor Pigeon suffered—and so did Captain Gwozditch's charger, Herzig. We had always managed to feed Pigeon well while he was with us, though there were times when Alice had literally to shed tears before forage was produced; however, at Liesh he was trusted to an Albanian stable and a heavy price paid for his maintenance—but the money was misappropriated and the horse left without food. Poor beast, we feared for a time that it was all up with him.

We were glad at night to close our shutters and sleep, if sleep we might. But the night was always full of horrid sounds—and then there were the rats.

There was one occasion when these creatures afforded us an unpleasant experience. Waking in the night I heard them as usual, but their movements were accompanied by a curious rustling of paper. Unfortunately I was too sleepy to do more than wonder dreamily where the paper came from up there among the rafters.

In the morning, however, the mystery was explained. The rats had been making free with our copy. They had appropriated—not bitten up and destroyed, but carried away whole—a quantity of manuscript, representing the best part of a week's work. It is astonishing how they can have dragged these pages, full foolscap size, into their hole without leaving some trace behind, but there is no doubt that they did so, and it was particularly galling afterwards to hear the rustling of paper from the nest in the wall

and know that we could not get at our precious documents short of pulling down the house.

One day we had a strange encounter. I have mentioned our soldier friend who had been a patient at the Skoplje hospital and whom we met when we were travelling from Mladenovatz to Pirot on the outbreak of the Bulgarian War. He said then, half-facetiously, that he wondered where we should meet again. We had caught sight of him at Prokuplje, but at a time when it was not possible to speak.

And now at Liesh we met him for the second time. He came, with other stragglers, trailing across the bridge. He had lost his regiment and had eaten little or nothing for days—bread was never forthcoming for the unfortunates who had failed to keep pace with their comrades.

He was so dirt-begrimed as to be almost unrecognizable. His face was pinched and scared and ashen grey—the tint that was common to the men of Serbia's phantom army.

Once more he recognized us and he came to a halt, leaning for support against the low stone wall of the filthy courtyard. His lips extended into a ghastly grin.

"So it is here that we have met again," he said.

We gave him food from our own small stock—bread was what he especially craved for. It is the want of bread that caused the greatest havoc among the Serbian soldiers, for at home, upon their farms, it is bread that forms their

staple diet. The Serbian peasant eats but little meat.

At Liesh as at Scutari, except from the army authorities, who dealt it out as scrupulously as they could, bread was practically unprocurable. Not even the extortionate prices—up to twenty francs for a loaf—asked and paid at other places would purchase it. For ourselves we were still lucky enough to receive our daily dole.

At Liesh we were in the habit of carrying thick slices of bread about with us, carefully concealed, in order to give them surreptitiously to hungry soldiers when the occasion presented itself. It would not have been wise to do so openly as the demand would very soon have exceeded the supply and serious trouble might have resulted.

We did all we could for our poor friend, but the stern finger of destiny pointed in one direction only—onwards, where his regiment had preceded him, along the marshy repellent road that led to Durazzo.

"Shall we meet again—at Corfu?" he asked grimly as he bade us farewell.

Poor fellow, did he ever reach Corfu? It is unlikely. That same afternoon we were talking to a British officer who was engaged upon road repair on behalf of the Adriatic Mission. He had just come from Durazzo.

"We are doing our best," he said, "but the men are dying like flies. The roadside is strewn with corpses—it is ghastly."

The fact was even more emphatically expressed

by one of the Mission orderlies—a typical British Tommy. "I was six months in Flanders, sir," he said, "in the trenches. But s'truth, I'd sooner be there than in this hell."

An exaggeration perhaps, but I think he meant what he said. The general opinion was that hell was out of date since Liesh had come into being.

And yet the Adriatic Mission was working itself to death—achieving, too, all that could be expected. But it had begun too late, and now its greatest endeavours could not cope with the forces ranged against it. Also although the initial difficulties had, in a measure, been overcome, although food-supplies really did begin to arrive at Medua, there were yet grave faults of administration due undoubtedly to the fact that the Allies were not acting in complete accord. In a sense it was a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth—to say nothing of the fact that the cooks, however willing they might be, were hampered by those fatal exigencies of routine and red tape.

And then things had gone too far. Men continued to die even with ample food in their hands. The fact of filling their worn-out stomachs in itself not infrequently proved fatal. I heard of men dying, standing up, in the very act of lifting bread to their mouths.

Luckily, I have reason to believe that before we left Medua a large consignment of flour was safely delivered.

The Adriatic Mission at Liesh was installed in

an ancient monastery on the hill. They did not have it to themselves; there were some Montenegrin officials settled there as well, also a priest of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and altogether there cannot have been much room to spare. The English Mission had the old refectory; it possessed a picture—very dilapidated—which was reported to be of great value; I was reminded of the screen in the Skoplje church for which, as I was seriously informed by the custodian, a million pounds had once been offered by a wealthy Englishman. Certainly it was a fine piece of work and had taken three brothers ten years to complete. The only other piece of antique furniture in the big dull room was the abbot's chair, which was dropping to pieces by sheer neglect—pathetic evidence of years of war and tribulation upon the land.

I used to wander up to the monastery pretty frequently during the first days of our stay at Liesh, for there was a telephone there, and I wanted to get into direct communication with Commander Ker at Medua, in order that he might warn us at once when there was a chance—if there should be a chance—of getting across to Brindisi; for since the regulation that no Serbian officer might take his wife to Corfu was to be strictly enforced, there was no object in our remaining with the army and facing—unless absolutely obliged to do so—the perilous and fatiguing march to Durazzo. Under the then existing conditions at Medua we preferred to

remain where we were, at Liesh, as long as it was possible to be warned in time of the departure of a boat.

Unfortunately telephonic communication was not easy, nor were the Montenegrins, who had charge of the arrangements, particularly accommodating. Again and again I used to toil up the hill, giving wide berth to the many groups of soldiers, who were always busy, sitting half naked in spite of the cold, searching their clothes in the effort to combat a prevailing pest; and then I might have to wait for an hour or so in the evil-smelling kitchen, with its huge hearth and its floor usually covered with newly stripped hides still reeking with blood, while efforts were made to obtain the connection.

And then when one day Commander Ker actually did telephone to us to come at once to Medua the message was never delivered—so we missed an opportunity which might very easily not have been repeated. After that I went myself to Medua and saw the telephone operator, who very kindly promised to communicate at once, direct to the Army Staff, as soon as another ship came in. Nor did he forget his promise, and it is largely due to his consideration that we were eventually able to make our escape. The notice, however, only came after we had practically given up hope and made all our preparations for going on with the army to Durazzo.

In the meanwhile we lived as best we might. Bread we had—the bread that was unprocurable

by most—but ordinary food-stuffs were scarce. Rice and macaroni, which had been our stand-by, gave out altogether. Our margarine was finished by now and there was no substitute obtainable—nor could one find eggs or milk or fresh vegetables. A few dried beans and Spanish onions were the best we could contrive. Sugar we got from the Staff—otherwise it would have cost us ten francs a kilo. Wine of the commonest sort was twenty francs a bottle. Brandy was unprocurable.

We found it very difficult to get any cooking done at all. Our old Albanian hostess was capricious, and she took a dislike to Christopher—who certainly did not possess an ingratiating manner. If she decided she would not cook she would not—and there was an end of it. Then we had to manage as best we could on tinned things—if we could get any.

But for us, our own petty trials and discomforts seemed to matter so little in comparison with the silent agony that deepened around us day by day, and which we were utterly helpless to alleviate. Even if we went hungry for twenty-four hours—or longer—it was in the consciousness that real starvation was not likely to be our lot as it was the lot of thousands about us; cold or drenched to the skin as we had often been, we yet knew that somewhere, sooner or later, we should find warmth and shelter, whereas others must go plodding on until many of them—shall we ever know how many? I have heard the total estimated as high as half a million in all,

civil and military—fell exhausted by the wayside.

That sense of helplessness in face of tragedy so profound was the worst thing that we had to endure. A more personal fear, ever present, was that of possible sickness overtaking one or the other of us. I should not care to attempt to draw a picture of the hell upon earth that passed for a hospital at Liesh; if one had to be carried to such a place one might as well have signed one's death warrant at the door.

Christopher managed to have a narrow escape. I think I have explained that he was a native of Herzegovina, and therefore keenly anxious not to fall into the hands of the Austrians. Also that he was a glutton.

We had been on very short commons, and no doubt he was hungry when one day, a ship with supplies having safely reached Medua, he was able to gratify his appetite with corned beef. He overate himself, and then committed the further indiscretion of drinking immoderately of well-water—and if ever wells had reason to be tainted it was the wells of Liesh. The result was dysentery and a temperature of over 104.

One could do nothing whatever. There were no drugs to be had—no medical relief of any kind. Doctors, of course, in plenty, but they were as helpless as ourselves. The hospital was a mortuary—poor Christopher's fear of being sent there was pathetic to witness. "Give him rice water," advised the doctor; so we scoured

the bazaar for rice, but it had all been exhausted days before.

He had no bed—very few people had. He just had his corner of the stable to sleep in. The air was horribly foul and, of course, there was no warmth.

It is difficult to get well under such conditions, but Christopher managed it. I think sheer fright must have acted as a tonic. He was so terribly afraid of the hospital, afraid, too, lest we should be compelled to leave him behind. But that illness taught him a salutary lesson.

As for the town of Liesh there is little that I need say. I do not think it could possibly be attractive even at ordinary times. It is not really a town—merely a narrow street, so narrow that people could almost shake hands across it—lying behind the more open space by the river. They call it Liesh Bazaar; Liesh village lies up on the hill, and I never had the curiosity to go there, though I did climb one day to the ruins of the ancient castle, a good deal higher up. These remains are very extensive—a largish town might have been included between the massive walls. Nobody could tell me much as to their history beyond, vaguely, that they were connected with the national hero Castriotti Skanderbeg. Very much higher up, on a mountain peak to which I had no ambition to climb, is a tomb which I was told is that of Skanderbeg himself; other people, however, denied this, and affirmed that the illustrious leader died and was buried in Italy.

It seemed to be as moot a question as that of the nationality of the hero; both Serbs and Albanians claim him as their own. I have heard most heated arguments on the subject.

That horrible little street of Liesh; it has left an impression upon my mind not easily eradicated. Here, as in the former halting-places, the Serbian soldiers dragged wearily up and down, and one knew that they were all actuated by the same motive—the hopeless search for bread. And if their clothing was grey and worn their faces were grey and worn too; a horrid harmony had come into being that struck a note of sympathy in the very depth of one's being.

The native Albanians, as at Scutari, battened upon these poor hungry men, striving their uttermost to suck blood from the bloodless. They would buy anything that the unfortunate Serbs had to sell at their own prices, and they would sell the food-stuffs they might happen to possess at their own prices as well; and no Jew could better have appreciated the difference between buying and selling. This haggling would go on in the street, and then, too, you could see men going about with bottles, selling wine and "rakia" by the glass. Yet there was never a hint of drunkenness; to my mind it is a wonderful testimony to the strength of the Serbian army that the soldiers never succumbed either to the temptation of drink or to that of loot. How easily, over and over again, might they have got out of hand, risen against their leaders, and

helped themselves to the bread of which they stood so badly in need! But the discipline of the Serb was never broken—he let his heart break first; may this stand to his eternal credit.

A filthy evil-smelling street, with its little dark shops, its reeking hides stretched out on the cobbled pavement so that one had to step over them, and its restless surging crowd of phantoms. Mud and filth lay everywhere, and heaps of offal which hungry men turned over in the hope of finding something with which to satisfy their craving: I have seen man and dog dispute a bone.

Now and again the crowd would part to allow of the passage of stretchers upon which dead or dying men were carried. The priest of the Second Army told us how he had to read the funeral service over forty soldiers a day; once, just outside the town, I came across a spot where as many men lay dead, all huddled together, waiting interment in a common grave.

One day, just before we left, Prince Alexander, the heir apparent, arrived at Liesh. He was carried in on a stretcher, for he was but slowly recovering from a serious operation which he had undergone at Scutari. It had been arranged that he should embark at once at Medua, but when he saw Liesh, when he realized that his army, the army of which he was Commander-in-Chief, had not yet reached its goal, he refused to abandon his troops by seeking personal safety in flight.

For what the Crown Prince had witnessed as he was carried in his rude litter on the road to Liesh had moved him to a very agony of pity. Stiff and frozen corpses had met his sorrowful eyes; he had seen hungry soldiers begging for bread, holding up skeleton hands.

And so he vowed that he would stay with his army to the end—and he kept his word.

A message came to us on the morning of the 19th of January that two ships would be leaving that day, and we must not miss this, our last chance. It was, indeed, high time. Cettinje had fallen some days ago, Scutari had been evacuated. The enemy was nearing Antivari. There was much talk of Montenegro having effected a separate peace. It was not likely that any further boats would leave San Giovanni di Medua.

And so Alice mounted Pigeon for the last time and we reached Medua about noon and were quickly installed in two good deck seats upon the smaller of the two steamers. Commander Ker, busy though he was, did his utmost to secure our comfort. All the afternoon the ship was being gradually filled with refugees, besides being heavily laden otherwise—among other things we took several pieces of artillery on board—so that we gradually got a list on the starboard side which was anything but comfortable, if not actually dangerous.

Nor did the enemy leave us alone. Two or three aeroplanes hovered about in the

course of the afternoon, but though they dropped bombs, no material damage was done. In which connection a rather amusing incident occurred.

Suddenly the warning bells began to ring, and a minute or two later the supposed aeroplane appeared and was given a warm reception. In the midst of the firing, however, Captain Gwozditch, who was with us, examining the visitor through his glasses, realized and pointed out a remarkable error.

It was not an aeroplane at all—it was an eagle.

We did not get off till near midnight, by which time the ship was most unpleasantly crowded—which, of course, was unavoidable. Every scrap of available accommodation had to be used, these two ships being the last that could possibly be expected to convey refugees from Medua. The scene upon the quay may be imagined. Men, women, and children hustled each other, animated by alternate hopes and fears, clamouring loudly to be passed on board; some tried to fight their way through and had to be thrust back—cruelly as it seemed, but of dire necessity. We realized that it was well for us that we had received our notice betimes, and had come early upon the scene, for, even with the best will in the world, I think it would have been hard for our friends to force a way for us through that struggling mass of humanity. How terrible must have been the strain is evidenced by the fact

that two men died very shortly after they had got on board.

For those who found no place there remained but one possibility of escape; they must set out again and tramp the long weary miles to Durazzo. The days—in many cases weeks—of waiting and hoping, of starvation and exposure, had all been in vain; they must go back to the road that had bruised their feet, and which now was all too likely to break their hearts.

It was a glorious moonlight night—luckily, since there was but little shelter on board, and so great was the crowd that movement was hardly possible after we were once wedged into our positions. It is no great exaggeration to say that we were all sitting in one another's laps, and when, later on, sea-sickness supervened in many cases, the misery and discomfort of the voyage may be imagined. There was, moreover, no food obtainable; we had a little with us—some bread and tinned meat—but under the circumstances one was hardly likely to have much appetite. We found, however, as on other occasions, that sucking lumps of sugar afforded considerable relief. I remember, too, how immensely grateful we were to an Adriatic Mission man who gave us a flask of drinking water.

We were not to be allowed to get away without a serious attempt on the part of the enemy to destroy us. We had barely left port five minutes before down came the bombs all round us from

an invisible aeroplane; they fell harmlessly into the sea, but one or two were so close that for a moment we imagined the ship had been hit. Our first impression was that we had struck a mine. A little later on we could plainly see that a fresh attack was being made upon unhappy Medua; what damage may have been done I have never heard.

Taking it all round that voyage was as uncomfortable an experience as any we had. For some thirty hours we were hardly able to leave our places, any movement upon the slippery sloping deck being only possible with the goodwill and by the help of others, since one could not maintain one's foothold unassisted, even if one had not to climb over the recumbent forms that blocked the way in every direction.

As usual, however, it was always possible to find a touch of humour to leaven the personal discomfort. On this occasion we found some amusement in watching the haughty behaviour of a well-dressed lady—how she contrived to carry that hat through Albania is a mystery—who was distinctly unhappy because circumstances had placed her in close contact with a family of refugees of low degree. Especially was she resentful of the well-meant familiarities of the sturdy peasant who represented the head of the party. But as night wore on pride had its fall. The lady became very weary—not to say seasick. Even the feather of her hat drooped disconsolately. Her head sank lower and lower

until at last it reposed upon the shoulders of her nearest neighbour—who happened to be the despised peasant. He was in very much the same condition as she, and their attitude was so unconsciously affectionate that we had to laugh in spite of our own troubles.

We were very well patrolled, and if there were submarines about—as I believe there were, for once we steered a zigzag course—they did not venture to attack us. I fancy the loss of the *Novara* to Austria a few days earlier may have inspired caution, for it is certain that conditions in the Adriatic were by now very different to what they were while we were at Scutari—when the Adriatic Mission was struggling to overcome adverse circumstances, and when the *Brindisi* was sunk with great loss of life close to Medua.

We reached Brindisi about noon, but were not allowed on shore. Everybody cheered up, however, and bore the long hours of waiting with equanimity, for there amid the French, English, and Italian battleships that filled the harbour they knew that they had at last drifted into safety.

We were luckier than most, for we got our formalities through by about four o'clock and, much to the envy of everybody, were taken off in a little tug. It was not till ten or eleven that night that the boat was finally cleared.

And so, on January 20, after the best part of three months' comparative severance from the

civilized world, we set foot upon a friendly shore. And Brindisi, which we had always heard contemptuously spoken of as "a ghastly hole," seemed to us—after Liesh—to be a very paradise upon earth.

CHAPTER XVII

AT HOME

LONDON, *April* 1916

IT is not for us to record any further details of the great tragedy of the Serbian Retreat, since it was not given us to follow that Via Dolorosa to its bitter end. The foul marshy road down the Albanian coast from Liesh to Durazzo, and—for many—from Durazzo to Valona, will remain for ever as a monument of human endurance and suffering, a monument to the martyred dead that lie quietly and at peace along its borders. Their names may not be known, there may be no cross to mark their resting-place, but history will tell of them—nor will the world forget. And as for their countrymen, their companions of the dreadful march—those who are to-day restored to health and strength—it is good to see their faces harden and their teeth set when you speak to them of their lost land and of their dead that fell upon the road, for no surer indication could be given that one day sooner or later, and perhaps there may not be long to wait, the hour of reckoning will fall and the treacherous invader be thrown back.

The heart of every Serb to-day aches for his

ravaged and bleeding country. He is aware, most painfully aware, that starvation has it in grim clasp, that it has been ruthlessly despoiled, that the cattle and the flocks have been driven from the land, the grain taken and the milk run dry; only in a few cases has he news of his dear ones left behind, while what he knows for certain is that women and children are starving to death.

The Crown Prince Alexander has been with us in London, and England has welcomed him and done him honour—this prince who is, in himself, the soul of his country. It is in him that Serbia trusts in the days that are to come, for she knows that not only has he served her well on the battlefield as her Commander-in-Chief, but she is aware, too, how anxious Alexander is to develop the capabilities of his land, to improve her agriculture, to raise her among the nations. The prince is the apostle of progress as well as a knight paladin. There is about him, as about his people, a curious blending of the mediæval and the modern; round him, as round Serbia, there is a fine glamour, for both prince and nation have proved themselves to be cast in the true heroic mould.

The Serbian soldiers adore their prince. We heard his praises sounded on all sides during the terrible retreat, nor was it only his bravery that was extolled, it was also his warm humanity, his kindness of heart. As for his physical courage—he is his father's son, the son of the old man who, weak and ill, half crippled, rose from his bed and

went to lead his troops against the Austrian foe; who fought in the trenches, comparing himself to an old "comitaji"; who rode out with his sons before the army and bade those who would of his troops follow him to victory or death—bidding the men who feared for their lives to return to their homes—and there was not one who swerved —the whole army followed their King. But that was before diplomacy began dictating to Serbia; it was when she was allowed to fight her own battles in her own fashion—and in fine fashion too.

And now that it is over, that the great mistake has been made which has resulted in the conquest of Serbia, it is for those who erred to make good. And that this will be the case Serbia is assured; she looks to England with clear unshaken confidence.

She believes that England will not fail her. Of this we were assured over and over again. The confidence that the shattered army reposes in our nation would be terrible if there was the least chance of England going back on her word, for the women who starve in Serbia and the men who mourn in exile trust in us heart and soul, and this boundless trust has done much to help them through the darkest hour of their history.

Serbia will never be defeated while she has a remnant of her army. Broken, bleeding, starving, she has saved her soul and her honour. She is one of those nations that no conqueror can tame, no brutality subdue. Her flaming spirit of liberty

escaped the invader, and a starving army carried the soul of Serbia with them into exile. They suffered cold and hunger gladly so that they could do this. The bones of dead soldiers that strew the pathway represent no vain sacrifice. These men died, but their comrades live—and Serbia breathes on in her army.

We have learnt many things since we have been in England; of the wonderful defence of the Babruna by Colonel Vassitch for instance, to which I would have paid earlier tribute had I had knowledge of it while compiling these pages; of the German trickery to induce soldiers and refugees to return to their homes—how they sent agents to circulate stories of the kind treatment accorded to those who had remained behind, and how the deluded few who took them at their word were put to toil like slaves upon the railway or even sent away to work in Hungary or Bulgaria; we heard of hideous Bulgarian atrocities in the south; of children and sick people turned out of homes and hospitals to make room for German troops; of the confiscation of funds; of women compelled to take long journeys on foot, so that many died by the way; of many things which will, no doubt, be fully told some day.

Much we heard, too, of the privations endured by the members of our former unit on their retreat to Monastir. It is good to record, however, that all got through safely, the only victim of the unit being the bull-dog, Soona, who, it may be remembered, had been left behind at

Skoplje. With a strange instinct she found her way, after the Bulgarian occupation, to the Paget Hospital; she was shockingly emaciated, but Dr. Armstrong tended to her and she may have lived, but when he, with the rest of the staff, was sent to Sofia he judged it kindest to put her painlessly to death.

As for Dr. Armstrong himself, he returned with Lady Paget and her staff to London as soon as permission was accorded. He had no complaints to make as to his treatment—but this was hardly to be expected.

One piece of intelligence came to hand that saddened us deeply. It was of the death of the two horses that had endeared themselves so much to our memories, Herzig and Pigeon. Poor beasts, they succumbed at Durazzo to what I believe must have been an attack of glanders; I understand that many horses perished from this scourge.

The Second Army with Voyvoda Stepanovitch and all our friends reached Durazzo after a terrible march of five days' duration. They had nothing but the highest praise for the efficient assistance that was rendered on the way by the Adriatic Mission. Eventually they were safely shipped to Corfu.

I should like to add a word here as to the behaviour of the Serbs at Corfu. Even the Greek papers, not particularly favourable to the strangers in their midst, have paid high tribute to their noble qualities. To quote from the

Athenai: "During their stay not a single violent act has been committed by them, not an egg eaten nor a glass of beer drunk that they have not paid—and paid well—for. No woman has been insulted by them, nowhere have they provoked quarrels, which are almost inherent to armies. Corfu has not seen a Serbian drunk or causing a disturbance in the streets. Few armies can boast of such qualities."

And now with these completed pages before me I have asked myself if it would be well to re-read, revise, and delete now that I have the means of correcting errors and, if necessary, modifying conclusions; but I still think it best to adhere to the original plan and allow them to go to press just as they stand, just as they were written during those dark days at Scutari and Liesh. Presented in any other way they would surely lose anything of convincement that they may possess.

* * * * *

The great Serbian Retreat is over, and Mr. Asquith has duly informed the House of Commons that it is indeed a cause for congratulation that so large a proportion of the Serbian army has been preserved—to fight another day. Even so were we asked to rejoice over the successful evacuation of Gallipoli where so many hundreds of brave lives were uselessly sacrificed—an evacuation that of necessity followed when Germany and Bulgaria were allowed to join hands across poor stricken Serbia.

The day for congratulation and rejoicing is not yet; it will not be until the bones that bleach on the long road the army trod have been avenged—as avenged they will be if England is England still.

And let it not be forgotten that Serbia has suffered in silence—her famished men made no complaint as they sank down and died; they said nothing and Serbia says nothing; no reproaches have escaped her anguished lips. Hers is the anguish of a nation whose heart has been broken—whose pride; and the tears of Serbia are as the bloody sweat that fell at Gethsemane: but her courage—ah, indeed we can unloose our tongues when talking of her courage and her patience; we can be uplifted by it, exalted, for this little nation has never been more glorious than in her moment of earthly defeat. In the sight of the unwise she seemed to die; but she has laid hold of life immortal, for the spirit of Serbia is unconquerable, the soul of Serbia is uncowed.

And is there not something terrible about such resignation — something unearthly — something that should strike awe into the souls of other nations? For remember the flags hung out in welcome at Nish—*the flags hung out to welcome troops that never came.*

EPILOGUE

A LITTLE GREY CROSS

CORFU, *May* 1916

THERE is a famous picture, well known in England for its frequent reproduction, which is called *The Island of the Dead.* I believe that the original is by Böcklin and hangs at Munich. This picture has always had a haunting fascination for me because of its subtle and beautiful suggestion of the greatest mystery of life—which is death.

The first view of the fortress of Corfu, approached from the sea, bears a strange resemblance to this picture.* To me it was so striking that for a moment I held my breath in silent amaze. For I knew that I was indeed approaching an Island of the Dead.

Yet the real Isle of Death is not actually Corfu. It is a little stretch of land, perhaps a kilometre in length from end to end and a quarter of a kilometre across, which is separated from the

* Since writing the above I have learnt that the famous picture was actually inspired by a little island off the coast of Corfu which, like the fortress, is conspicuous for its tall cypress-trees. It is a spot of ancient renown. For some unknown reason it is now called the Rat Island, but its chief claim to celebrity is its connection with the wanderings of Ulysses.

main island by a narrow reach of water. This is Vido, and it is here that the worn-out Serbian soldiers were brought to die.

To-day the waves ripple gently round Vido, and the sky overhead is as blue as the Madonna's robe, but the green islet has an air of sadness about it, of gentle melancholy, just as if the very soil was aware that it had become the abode of the dead.

The living shun Vido. For a time this little island with its sloping green banks was practically cut off from the world—given over entirely to the sick, to the poor weary soldiers of Serbia who had no strength left in them—the pale, starved victims of the great retreat. These were the shadows, the spectres that crowded Vido for weeks until the sea and the earth took the worn-out bodies to them; and so Vido gradually found itself a lonely isle once more—a soldiers' graveyard.

The living feel that they have no place on Vido; it has ceased to belong to man and woman, it has become a tomb—a very sacred tomb—an island of rest and sleep.

Sun-tanned soldiers, Serbs, happily restored to health and strength, gaze at the isle with awe, for to them Vido must ever be a place set apart; and the waves that lap the shore are deep, wide winding-sheets. Death has held solemn court at Vido, he has stretched out his hands and bestowed his benediction upon it, he has hallowed it for all the centuries; he has sown dead bones in the



THE DEDICATION OF THE LITTLE CROSS ON THE ISLE OF VIDO

soil or confided them to the lapping sea—the bones of heroes; he has given to the weary sweet rest.

There is a little cross on Vido, a simple little cross of grey stone, that was erected there unostentatiously by some friends of Serbia. It bears inscriptions in Serbian and English. Perhaps for its very simplicity it is the most appropriate of monuments for the humble heroes whose resting-place it marks. For anything more ornate and elaborate would surely jar upon the senses, hurt the eyes; the island of Vido is a monument in itself.

It is not legitimate in Greece to erect a memorial stone over the tombs of the dead unless it has received the blessing and sanction of the Church; therefore the necessary ceremony was arranged, and it was to be as simple and unostentatious as the stone itself. There was to be no big function, no elaborate ceremonial. The donors of the cross aimed at nothing beyond bestowing the little tribute of their own respect.

But circumstances did not fall out quite as were anticipated, the news leaked out—it was reported in high places. Then it was recalled that as yet no High Mass had been held on Vido, what better opportunity than this could present itself?

And so the simple requiem that had been arranged became a great ceremony. The Archbishop himself celebrated Mass, attended by richly garbed Patriarchs of the Church, and all

the civil and military notabilities who throng Corfu were present. The Crown Prince of Serbia surrounded by his generals and his Ministers, men of high estate doing honour to the lowly dead.

Imagine the scene : the sun was shining brightly that morning, the sea was of the deepest blue, the waves lapped the shore gently—oh, very gently—as if they would make harmonious echo to the solemn chanting of the Mass, and the island that Death had marked for his own became crowded with Serbian, English, French, and Greek officers ; but a few hours later silence reigned once more on Vido—the island had been left to its quiet repose.

The bright hues of the morning faded away—gave place to the soft greys of twilight, and at night the moon came out and the rays of the moon played softly, mystically, upon the little grey stone cross.

Little cross—little cross of grey stone—ah, no more fitting monument could have been raised to Serbia's peasant army than this simple cross ; for the men who died on the island of Vido were men of humble birth who set little value on the pomps and glories of this world, men who loved their country above all things—brave soldiers who endured cold and hunger and finally perished of exhaustion and disease on a soil that was not their own soil.

They saw perchance in vision ere they died the cross on which the Divine Redeemer hung,

the cross of their salvation, and being very spent and weary perhaps He came to them Himself at the close of the day—Jesus the Carpenter, Christ, the Son of God, the Man who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. Yes, in all reverence let us believe that these poor Serbian soldiers, these simple peasants, did not walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death alone, but were led by One who had trodden the path before, the Man who gave His life, His blood, for others, and Who, like these poor followers of His, had stepped with bruised feet upon the road to Calvary.

Soldiers of mean estate, but men who have become as the shining stars of the morning; for Serbia's soldiers have left a deathless memory behind them. The men whose bodies have been laid to rest on Vido died willingly for their country and their country will not forget them, and their dust will hallow this lonely little isle —the island that has for its symbol a stone cross.

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